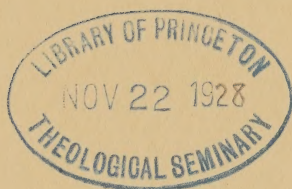


**THE INDIAN AND CHRISTIAN MIRACLES  
OF  
WALKING ON THE WATER**

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**BROWN**



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The Indian and Christian

miracles of walking on the

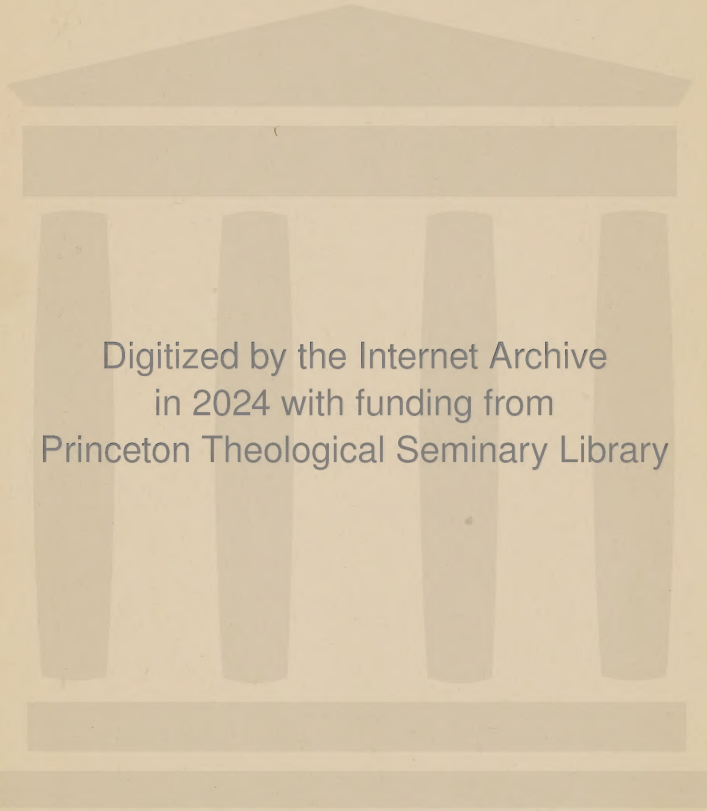






INDIAN AND CHRISTIAN MIRACLES  
OF WALKING ON THE WATER





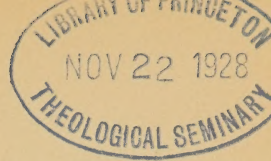
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THE BUDDHA WALKS AMID THE WATERS OF THE  
NĀIRAÑJANĀ RIVER AT URUVILVĀ  
(SANCHI SCULPTURE FROM THE 1ST CENTURY B. C.; SEE PAGES 20, 21.)





The Indian and Christian Miracles  
of  
Walking on the Water

BY

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in  
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## PREFACE

**I**N this study I make no effort to exhaust the endless number of later Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Christian, and African legends exemplifying walking on the water. I confine myself to the material bearing directly upon my problem, most of which is of pre-Christian antiquity.

Although in the case of all source material from India I have invariably consulted the original texts, I have, whenever possible, used the translations of other scholars, thus taking advantage of their labor, and in most cases, excellent English diction.

It is a pleasure here to acknowledge the assistance I have received from many scholars: Dr. E. W. Burlingame, especially, whose works are cited frequently; my father, Professor George W. Brown, of the Kennedy School of Missions, Hartford; Professor A. V. Williams Jackson, Columbia University; Professor Henry J. Cadbury, Bryn Mawr College; Miss Helen E. Fernald, of the University of Pennsylvania Museum; Miss Helen M. Johnson, Guggenheim Fellow; and Dr. John K. Shryock, University of Pennsylvania.

W. NORMAN BROWN.

PHILADELPHIA,  
*March*, 1928.





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## FOREWORD

THE high point in any discussion of the theme of walking on the water is likely to be the question of relationship between the Indian legends illustrating it and the Christian. That there exists at least one tale in Buddhist literature closely paralleling the story of Peter walking on the Sea of Galilee has long since ceased to be news, and the fact has become one of considerable interest in the controversy concerning the connection of Buddhism with Christianity, and, in a larger sphere, of India with the Occident.<sup>1</sup> In this study I have no desire to discuss either of these general questions; I shall keep to the one point of the relationship between the miracles of walking on the water. Nevertheless, my conclusions, if sound, will be of significance in regard to the larger problems.

Previous discussions of these miracles have been unconvincing, in part at least because never has all the material been assembled that is available, nor has that which has been presented been cor-

<sup>1</sup> A German scholar has published a forty-five page bibliography on the question of Buddhist and Christian correspondences, which he describes as only "eine tentative Zusammenstellung:" Hans Haas, *Bibliographie zur Frage nach den Wechselbeziehungen zwischen Buddhismus und Christentum*, being No. 6 of the *Veröffentlichungen des Forschungsinstituts für vergleichende Religionsgeschichte an der Universität Leipzig* (Leipzig, 1922). The bibliography is itself an Anhang to No. 5 in the same series by the same author, "*Das Scherflein der Witwe*" und seine Entsprechung im *Tripitaka*. Two additional titles of importance, not included in that bibliography, are: P. Saintyves, *Essais de folklore biblique* (Paris, 1922); and H. Günter, *Buddha in der abendländische Legende?* (Leipzig, 1922). The grief work on the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity is Garbe, *Indien und das Christentum* (Tübingen, 1914). Our story is treated in Chap. I; for an English translation of this chapter see *Monist*, XXIV, pp. 481 ff. The great collection of Buddhist and Christian parallels is Edmunds, *Buddhist and Christian Gospels*, 2 vols. (4th ed., Philadelphia, 1908-09.)

## FOREWORD

rectly and fully interpreted. These strictures apply particularly to the presentation of material from India. Only a few of the many stories there illustrating our theme have been brought to bear upon the question of relationship; further, the miracle has not been adequately described in its historical and doctrinal setting and related to cognate miracles; and, most important of all, the chain of evolution of the crucial Buddhist tale, the introduction to Jātaka 190, has never been traced. Neither have the Christian miracles been treated satisfactorily. Only one of them, namely, the legend concerning Peter, has had conspicuous attention; and neither it nor the legend about Christ has been adequately discussed in relation to its environment.

Although it is too much to hope that in this discussion I can once and for all settle the question of the connection between these Indian and Christian miracles, I can at least present and interpret the material that has come to my hand, and arrive at results of seeming plausibility. To demonstrate with mathematical inevitability that legends so remote geographically are connected genetically one would need categorical textual testimony that they were transported from one region to the other, and there, though aliens, were welcomed by a native faith into its canonical lore. We have at present no such conclusive evidence. The most we can hope to show is a strong probability that this was the case, a probability so strong that in view of the lack of completely definitive evidence it should amount practically to finality.

PART I  
INDIAN LITERATURE





## WALKING ON THE WATER IN INDIAN LITERATURE

### I. WALKING ON WATER IN INDIAN LITERATURE

THE act of walking on water is in India to be regarded merely as one of several ways of crossing water magically, all of which are frequently illustrated in the literature. The other ways are to walk through water that has magically been reduced in depth, and to fly across the water (or, to disappear and suddenly reappear across the water). These three ways are not marked off from one another by hard and fast divisions, but sometimes in variants of the same story are interchangeable. They come from a period of great antiquity, the earliest instances appearing in the Rigveda and being therefore not later than 800 B. C., and are again all securely founded on native Indian metaphysical doctrines. These doctrines provide four means of accomplishing the miracle: first, religious act; second, the magic power of truth, being a specialized variant of the first; third, the psychic power of levitation; and fourth, the magic aid of the Buddha—this last means having affinities to the first and third.

#### A. RELIGIOUS ACT

The earliest example of crossing water magically appears in Rigveda 3.33, where it is accomplished by means of a religious act. The hymn is famous, celebrating the crossing of the rivers Vipāś and Śutudrī, the modern Beas and Sutlej in the Panjab, by a force of Aryans under Sudās. We need not press the hymn too closely for a historical basis, although it may well have one—a raid upon a neighboring Aryan tribe or upon non-Aryan Dasyus, or perhaps a definite step in the advance of the Aryans across northern India. The hymn is in the form of a dialogue between the rishi Viśvāmītra and the two Rivers.

1. (*Viśvāmītra*) Forth from the lap of the mountains,  
eager, unloosed, like a pair of mares in a race, like two bright  
mother cows licking (their young), the Vipāś and the Śutudrī

hasten (flowing) with milk.

2. Driven by Indra, seeking a free course, these two, as though yoked to a chariot, go toward the sea. Leaping over each other with your waves and swelling, each of you seeks the other, O bright ones.

3. I have come here to the most motherly of rivers; we have arrived at Vipāś, the broad, the lovely; licking each other, like mothers a calf, they flow on together to their common bed.

4. (*Rivers*) We two streams here, swelling with milk, flow on to our god-appointed bed. Not to be stopped is our flood in its full rush; what does the priest wish shouting to the rivers?

5. (*Viśvāmitra*) Stay for a moment, in your courses, you pious ones, at my call accompanied with *soma*. My mighty prayer is to the river; in need of help the son of Kuśika has shouted out.

6. (*Rivers*) Indra, who has a club for his arm, dug out a hole for us; he slew Vṛtra, who blocked the rivers; god Savitar, the fair-handed, led us; at his urging we go forth wide.

7. (*Viśvāmitra*) For ever must this hero deed of Indra be praised, that he cut to pieces the serpent: with his club he smote away the restraints; forth came the waters eager for their course.

8. (*Rivers*) This word, O singer, forget not, that future generations may make it resound of thee; in hymns, O bard, show us favor; humiliate us not among men. Reverence to thee!

9. (*Viśvāmitra*) Pray listen, sisters, to the bard; he has come to you from afar with wagon and chariot: pray bow down yourselves; become easy to cross. O rivers, be lower than the axles with your streams.

10. (*Rivers*) We shall heed thy words, O bard; thou hast come from afar with wagon and chariot. Low shall I bow myself like a blooming young woman; like a maiden to her lover I shall yield to thee.

11. (*Viśvāmitra*) Just as soon as the Bharatas have crossed thee, an eager horde in search of booty, incited by Indra, the flood shall flow on in full rush—I ask the favor of you, the worshipful.

12. The Bharatas have crossed over seeking booty; the priest has won the favor of the rivers; you shall swell forth refreshing, bounteous; you shall fill up your beds, move on swiftly.

13. May your waves reach up as far as the hubs, but, O waters, spare the reins; and let not the two innocent, faultless oxen come to harm.

It is clear from vs. 5 that Viśvāmitra's success is due to the

efficacy of his pious act; it operates as a charm or spell to make the waters subside and allow the hosts to pass over. Not merely does it influence the goddesses of the river; it also secures the rishi the aid of Indra; for the mention of his name in the hymn is by no means incidental or merely reminiscent of his great feat, so frequently celebrated in the Rigveda, of freeing the pent up waters from the envious clutch of the arch-demon Vṛtra. Rather, Indra has a definite part to play here as the master of the rivers, a phase of his wider connection with the waters, for he, like Varuṇa, is the regent of the heavenly and earthly waters,<sup>2</sup> and in post-Rigvedic times he becomes *par excellence* a rain god. The feat of crossing these streams is definitely ascribed to Indra's favor in RV 3.53.9, "The great rishi . . . stayed the billowy river; when Viśvāmitra led Sudās, Indra had pleasure in the Kuśikas." Twice again, the feat is mentioned as due to Indra's help, although the rishi making the prayer is not Viśvāmitra but his rival Vasiṣṭha: RV 7.18.5, "Yea, the wide spread floods Indra made into fords, easy to cross, for Sudās," and RV 7.33. Similar help in crossing rivers is given by Indra to Turvīti and Vayya in RV 2.13.12 and RV 4.19.6, to Turvīti alone in RV 1.61.11, to Turvaśa and Yadu in RV 1.174.9, and to a person unnamed in RV 2.15.5. The phenomenon is thus securely established in the tradition of the Rigveda; at the very dawn of Hindu literature we find it present, and we find for it likewise a clear, solid basis in the theology—Indra as god of the waters miraculously renders them passable to his worshippers.

There is another point to be observed in connection with these legends. As far as the text gives us specific information the rivers became passable not because they ceased flowing and provided passage on dry land, as did the Jordan for the Hebrews, not because they became solid as we shall later see the Euphrates did for Alexander, not because the men obtained some magic power that enabled them to overcome the law of gravity and walk on the surface of the water, as did Jesus, Peter, and many Indian characters, but because their depth was lessened and they were made fordable. Of all the ways that rivers could be crossed magically, this is the simplest and the one most likely to be inspired in literature by some actual occurrence. A rationalizer of Rigvedic legend might well say that the forces of Sudās, waiting to cross the Beas and the Sutlej, were

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Griswold, *Religion of the Rigveda*, pp. 181 f., 187 ff., 202 ff.; Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and the Upanishads*, p. 129



favored by an unexpected subsidence of the rivers, and that out of this happening grew the legend that Viśvāmītra or Vasiṣṭha accomplished a miracle by securing the aid of the god. We shall later find in Western Asia similar tales of crossing rivers when they suddenly grew shallow, to the amazement of observers, who ascribed the unusual occurrence to divine interposition. In the same way the Hebrew legend of passing through the Red Sea is explained as based on the rising of a mighty wind that blew back the waters, a possible historical incident to which later tradition added supernatural elements, with the result that we not only find one miracle of divided waters in the Old Testament, but others secondarily derived from it concerning the Jordan, which can have no such rational basis.

The remaining ancient legends in India that illustrate magical crossing of water are, as far as my observation extends, more narrowly based on one or the other of three specific metaphysical doctrines: either the efficacy of the power of truth; the levitational powers of the religious adept; or the magical aid of the Buddha.<sup>3</sup>

#### B. ACT OF TRUTH

In very early times in India the speaking of truth became invested with magic power. The notion seems based on ideas found in the Rigveda, although we have not, as far as I am aware, documentary evidence that it was recognized before the period of the Brāhmaṇas, but this in itself carries us back to a time prior to 600 B. C. The starting point seems to be the *satyam ṛtaṃ ca* of the Rigveda, "truth and cosmic order", which are subject to the god Varuṇa; but we must be careful not to read an ethical concept into this phrase, especially when it serves as the foundation of later sacrificial magic performances. In the Brāhmaṇas the truth that is so potent is the truth of exactitude in the sacrifice, a ritual or ceremonial accuracy. The idea is brought out by Keith, from whom I

<sup>3</sup>There is a reference in Mahābhārata 7.61.9 to the pious king Dilīpa, whose chariot did not sink in the water, but no story is given. The age of the passage is uncertain, for the text in which it appears may have been put in its present form any time between 400 B. C. and 400 A. D., although it is safe to say that the tradition itself is older than the text.

A story in which a river is induced to favor one in need is that in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa 10.3.50, where a river gives passage to the infant Krishna, whose father is fleeing with him from the evil Kāṇsa. The same legend appears in Bhāsa's drama Bāla-carita: Vasudeva flees with the infant Krishna; the darkness is impenetrable, but a marvellous light comes from the child, and the Yamunā makes a dry path for him to cross (Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*, p. 98).

quote an important passage: "The sense of the importance of exactitude in the rite is seen in the famous ritual of confession which is performed at the Varuṇapraghāṣas, when the priest, the Pratiprasthātr, asks the wife of the sacrificer with whom she consorts, other than her husband. It is essential that she should confess, since else it will go badly with her kinsfolk, an interesting assertion of the solidarity of the kin. The speaking out of the sin diminishes it, but not, it appears, by anything else than that it brings exactitude again into the order of things: the wife commits an offense against Varuṇa, in that being the wife of one she consorts with another: the statement of the true fact removes the inexactitude, and repairs in so far the defect. It brings truth, i. e. reality, and order into the rite. The position of Varuṇa in this regard is of importance as it indicates in what degree the high conception of the Varuṇa of the Rīgveda has been degraded by the passage of time and the growing preference for the sacrifice. He is not regarded in the ritual, as it stands, as more than the power which represents the introduction of irregularity into the facts of the universe."<sup>4</sup>

This rite has a double interest for us. First, it illustrates the notion that the mere truth is able to render the sacrifice effective even though it be a truth that reveals a sin. It has a magical value that is uninfluenced by ethical considerations. Many other passages in Vedic literature indicate the magical power of truth, such as the famous passage of the ordeal with the heated axe in Chāndogya Upanishad 6.16,<sup>5</sup> but few show so clearly as this rite that it is truth for its own sake without reference to any ethical content. Secondly, the truth is used so effectively under the auspices of Varuṇa, who in the Rīgveda is the custodian of the *ṛta*, the cosmic order, universal and personal truth. Now Varuṇa is not only the guardian of the *ṛta*; he is also the god *par excellence* of the waters both heavenly and earthly.<sup>6</sup> Hence we see again in the Brāhmaṇas that oaths may be made *inter alia* "by waters, or Varuṇa, and the Indian to this day swears in some cases by Ganges water which he holds in his hand. The legal literature allows oaths for a Brahman by his truth. . . ." <sup>7</sup> Is it accidental that oaths may be made by Varuṇa, who is the guardian of the truth, and by water, which

<sup>4</sup>Keith, *Religion and Philosophy of the Veda and Upanishads*, pp. 456, 471, 473, 478, quotation from p. 471.

<sup>5</sup>Discussed by Burlingame, *JRAS*, 1917, pp. 435 f.

<sup>6</sup>Cf., Griswold, *Religion of the Rīgveda*, pp. 136 ff.

<sup>7</sup>Quoted from Keith, *op. cit.*, p. 395, where appear some references.

is especially under his dominion, and by truth, which is under his protection?

From such ideas as these evolves the celebrated "Act of Truth", concerning which Burlingame has written a most illuminating article.<sup>8</sup> This act is a solemn, formal declaration of the truth by means of which miraculous deeds may be accomplished. There is a formulaic mode of expression, which is perhaps the last survival of the old ritualistic use of the truth I have mentioned above; for the later Act of Truth has no connection with the sacrifice. It is quite apparent that the truth is effective, merely because it is the truth, and not because of any ethical value attached to truthspeak-ing, just as in the Varuṇapraghāsa rites; an examination of many of Burlingame's stories shows this, but especially of that in the Milindapañha, by which the courtesan Bindumatī caused the river Ganges to flow back upstream. After she had performed the feat King Asoka said to her, "You possess the Power of Truth! You, a thief, a cheat, corrupt, cleft in twain, vicious, a wicked old sinner who have broken the bonds of morality and live on the plunder of fools". "It is true, your Majesty; I am what you say. But even I, wicked woman that I am, possess an Act of Truth by means of which, should I so desire, I could turn the world of men and the worlds of the gods upside down." Said the king, "But what is this Act of Truth? Pray enlighten me". "Your Majesty, whosoever gives me money, be he a Khattiya or a Brāhmaṇa or a Vessa or a Sudda or of any other caste soever, I treat them all exactly alike. If he be a Khattiya, I make no distinction in his favor. If he be a Sudda, I despise him not. Free alike from fawning and contempt, I serve the owner of the money. This, your Majesty, is the Act of Truth by which I caused the mighty Ganges to flow back up-stream."<sup>9</sup>

The truth as a magic spell, often fairly well divorced from religious ceremony yet always sanctioned by religion and employed in a religious spirit, has been illustrated in literature from the time of the Mahābhārata and in one of the older portions of that work, the Nala episode. There it is thrice employed by Damayantī: first, to compel the gods, who had come to her Svayamvara disguised as her lover Nala, to assume their true appearance; secondly, when

<sup>8</sup>JRAS, 1917, pp. 429-467.

<sup>9</sup>The translation, with this version of the whole duty of a prostitute, is by Burlingame, *loc. cit.*, p. 440.

she was wandering alone in the forest after being deserted by Nala, to strike down an impious hunter who would have laid unchaste hands upon her; thirdly, when Nala after they were reunited doubted her constancy, to summon the Wind god to remove his doubts. It appears in other texts, but especially in those of the Buddhists (the Pali term is *saccakiriyā* "Truth Act", and the Sanskrit *satyādhiṣṭhāna* "Truth Command"; other terms occur), who use it to this very day.<sup>10</sup>

One other point. It is interesting to note that in Burlingame's long paper more illustrations of the Act of Truth concern miracles that deal with water than with anything else. Thus, it is used to roll back the ocean, to make a river flow backwards, to cross a river on dry foot, as a rain charm, and to obtain water to drink. And perhaps in this connection it might also be pertinent to mention that it is used to put out a forest fire, which "instantly went out, like a torch plunged in water," or, again, "so soon as the fire encountered his words, just as if it had reached a river, it immediately abated." Does this fact justify us in saying that it is Varuṇa as custodian of the waters and at the same time as guardian of the truth who makes the Act of Truth efficacious? Burlingame's fictional illustrations would not be calculated to make us draw this conclusion, but the facts I have mentioned concerning the Varuṇapraghāsa rites make it seem probable. Thus, while the point is not vital to the main theme of this paper, it seems worth noting that the Act of Truth is probably valid because it is the historical survival of an appeal to Varuṇa, the god of truth, and the typical illustrations of the Act are those that accomplish miracles connected with water, Varuṇa's peculiar element.

The legends showing walking on the water by means of an Act of Truth are not found in texts of any great antiquity, although one of them seems to be related to another legend of walking on the water that is of great age. It is, of course, pertinent to remark that the legends are older than the texts in which they appear, for time must have been required for them to gain recognition as authentic; but since we cannot say how much time must have been required, the remark is after all not of any large value.

The oldest text containing one of these tales is the *Milindapañha* 4.1.46, dating from somewhere near the beginning of the Christian

<sup>10</sup>Burlingame, *loc. cit.*, p. 467



era.<sup>11</sup> The story is not related to any other with which I am acquainted, whether in India or outside. The sage Nāgasena tells King Milinda: "Your Majesty, in the land of China there is a king who, once every four months, desiring to make offering to the great ocean, performs an Act of Truth, and then proceeds in his chariot of state a league's distance into the great ocean. Before the chariot of state the mighty mass of water rolls back, and, as he returns, it pours back again."<sup>12</sup>

Our next legend is from Buddhaghosa's commentary on the Aṅguttara Nikāya 193-195, a text of the fifth century A. D. King Kappina is on his way to enter the religious life under the Buddha. I quote from the translation by Burlingame in his *Buddhist Parables*, pp. 173 f.

Now the king, with his thousand ministers, reached the bank of the Ganges. But at this time the Ganges was full. When the king saw this, he said: "The Ganges here is full, and swarms with savage fish. Moreover we have with us no slaves or men to make boats or rafts for us. But of this Teacher the virtues extend from the Avīci Hell beneath to the Peak of Existence above. If this Teacher be the Supremely Enlightened Buddha, may not the tips of the hoofs of these horses be wetted!"

They caused the horses to spring forward on the surface of the water. Of not a single horse was so much as the tip of the hoof wetted. On a king's highway proceeding, as it were, they went to the far shore. Farther on they reached another river. There, was needed no other Act of Truth. By the same Act of Truth, that river also, half a league in breadth, did they cross over. Then they reached the third river, the mighty river Candabhāgā. That river also, by the same Act of Truth, did they cross over.

Thus King Kappina with his retinue reached the Buddha, became established in Sainthood, and entered the Order. Later in the story his wife, Queen Anojā, also set out for the Buddha.

Queen Anojā, surrounded by a thousand chariots, reaching the bank of the Ganges and seeing no boat or raft brought for the King, by her own intuition concluded: "The King must have crossed by making an Act of Truth. But this Teacher was reborn not for them alone. If this Teacher be the Supremely Enlightened Buddha, may our chariots not

<sup>11</sup> See Winternitz, *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur*, 2.1.140.

<sup>12</sup> Translation by Burlingame, *loc. cit.*, p. 439.



sink into the water!"<sup>13</sup>

She caused the chariots to spring forward on the surface of the water. Of the chariots not even so much as the outer rims of the wheels were wetted. The second river also, the third river also, she crossed by the same Act of Truth.

When they arrived the Buddha by magic power prevented them from seeing their husbands, who otherwise would have been plainly visible, for he knew that if they saw their husbands lust would spring up in their hearts and they would not attain the Path and the Fruits. After the conversion had been accomplished, he removed the magic invisibility, and they saw their husbands, but now no harm could result, for lust was dead.

A variant of this story is found in the commentary on the Dhammapada,<sup>14</sup> another text from the fifth century A. D., which claims, however, to be based on much older Sinhalese materials; and it also appears in the Theragāthā commentary 235. This wide diffusion of the legend in Buddhist hagiography argues a certain amount of antiquity for it, as does also the tradition of its lengthy existence in Sinhalese before being translated into Pali; but obviously it is impossible to say how great is that antiquity; the tradition hardly offers the basis even for a guess. In a faint way it recalls the legend of Rigveda 3.33 (see above), but the resemblance is after all so slight that no conclusion can be based upon it. More weighty is its clear connection with the story of Yasa's conversion, as found in the Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga 1. 7-10, and elsewhere, a legend to which we shall return later in this study. The connection is twofold. First, in the Chinese version of Yasa's (or Yasada's) conversion the young man, by means of the Buddha's help, magically walks across the river Varāṇā (modern Barṇā) to reach the Buddha.<sup>15</sup> It became shallow so that he could wade over. This detail does not appear in the Mahāvagga, but it echoes so well the way in which the Aryans in Rigveda 3.33 crossed the Beas and the Sutlej that we may well regard it as of antiquity; certainly it is of definitely Indian origin. Secondly, in the story of the conversion of Yasa, as in that of King Kappina and Queen Anojā, the Buddha by means of his magic power renders the first convert invisible to his relatives

<sup>13</sup>Cf., the allusion to King Dilīpa in Mahābhārata 7.61.9; his chariot did not sink in the water. See note 3 above.

<sup>14</sup>Translated by Burlingame, *Buddhist Legends*, 2.169 ff. In this version it is stated that the surface of the water was like a flat rock.

<sup>15</sup>See in Beal, *The Romantic Legend of Sākyā Buddha*, p. 263.

who come inquiring. This is found in the Mahāvagga, and is therefore of great antiquity. The story is that after Yasa had gone to the Buddha at Sarnath and become converted, his mother began to grieve and induced the young man's father to go seek him. But when he reached the Buddha, the latter first made Yasa invisible; and when the father asked the Buddha if he had seen the young man, the Buddha answered evasively. Then he preached to the father, establishing him part way on the road to salvation. After that he made Yasa visible to his father, who then asked his son to return to his grief stricken mother. The Buddha accompanied Yasa to his home, where he converted both the mother and Yasa's wife, who became his first female lay disciples. The connection between this tale and the conversion of King Kappina and Queen Anojā is undeniable. What is more the story in the Mahāvagga is very old: Winternitz thinks it can hardly be later than 300 B. C.<sup>16</sup> Even if we do not accept so early a date, we cannot set it later than the first century B. C.,<sup>17</sup> and it is therefore pre-Christian; but the chances are that the Yasa legend is very old, for it seems to be the source of legends which afterwards were attached to the Buddha.

The Jains also know of crossing water by means of an Act of Truth. The story appears in Bhāvadevasūri's Pārśvanāthacaritra, a work of the fourteenth century A. D., based on older materials. The story is analyzed by Bloomfield, from whom I quote.<sup>18</sup>

A wise king heard that his brother Soma, a Sage, was sojourning in a park outside his city. He went to pay his respects, listened to the law from his mouth, and returned to the palace. The chief queen then made the following vow: "I shall in the morning salute this Sage, and not take food before he has feasted." Now, on the road between the city and the park, was a river. When she arrived there by night the river was in flood, too deep for crossing. In the morning she asked her husband how she might obtain her heart's desire. The king said: "Go cheerfully with your retinue, adore the River Goddess, and with pure mind recite, 'O Goddess River, if my husband has practiced chastity since the day on which he paid his devotions to my brother-in-law, then promptly give me passage.'" The queen reflected in surprise: "Why now does the king, the fifth Protector of the

<sup>16</sup>*Geschichte der Indischen Literatur* 2.1.20.

<sup>17</sup>Cf., Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 20, 24.

<sup>18</sup>Bloomfield, *The Life and Stories of the Jaina Savior Pārśvanātha*, pp. 80 f.

World, say such an absurd thing? Since the day of his devotion to his brother, I have become pregnant by him with a son; that wifely state of mine he knows full well." Nevertheless out of wifely devotion, she went with her retinue to the bank of the river, honored the River Goddess, and made the Truth-Declaration (*satyaśrāvaṇa*), as told by her husband. At once the river banked its waters to the right and to the left, became shallow, and the queen crossed.

After revering and feasting the Sage she told him her story, and asked how her husband's inconceivable chastity could be valid. The sage replied: "When I took the vow, from that time on the king also became indifferent to earthly matters. But as there was no one to bear the burden of royalty he kept on performing his royal acts, in deed, but not in thought. The king's chastity is valid, because his mind is unspotted, even as a lotus that stands in the mud."

The queen then bade adieu to the Sage, and asked him how she was to recross the river. The Sage told: "You must say to the Goddess River, 'If that Sage, since taking the vow, has steadily lived in fast, then give me passage.'" The queen in renewed surprise went to the bank of the river, recited the words of the Sage, crossed, and arrived home. She narrated all to the king, and asked, "How could the Sage be in fast, since I myself entertained him with food?" The king replied, "You are simple, O queen, you do not grasp the spirit of religion: the lofty-minded Sage is indifferent to both eating and non-eating. Mind is the root, speech the crown, deed the branch-expansion of the tree of religion: from the firm *root* of that tree everything springs forth." Then the queen understood.

This story with its paradoxical refinements of the Act of Truth is obviously late not only in date but also in metaphysic; nevertheless some of its elements go back to the very oldest sphere of thought concerning magically crossing water. Just as in Rigveda 3.33, the River Goddess is addressed, while the miracle consists in the sudden and magical reduction of the water's depth.

### C. PSYCHIC POWER OF LEVITATION

Walking on the water is recognized in India as one of the stages of the psychic power of levitation, of which the highest grade is flying through the air. Levitation is very old in Hindu literature, appearing in Rigveda 10.136, and therefore being from before 800 B. C. This hymn describes the sun in terms of the earthly muni (ecstatic ascetic), and thus praises both.

1. The long-haired one (i. e., the sun as muni) carries the fire; the long-haired one carries the poison; the long-haired one carries heaven and earth. The long-haired one is all the sky which is to be seen; the long-haired one is here called the light.

2. The munis, wind-girdled, wear soiled yellow garments; they follow the course of the Wind when the gods have entered them.

3. Transported through the practise of muni-asceticism, we mount the winds; you mortals see only our bodies.

4. He flies through the air looking upon forms of every sort, the muni, who has become a friend to benefit every god.

5. Vāta's (the Wind's) horse, Vāyu's (the Wind's) friend is then the muni, incited by the gods. In both oceans he dwells, the eastern and the western.

6. Wandering on the path of the Apsarases, the Gandharvas, and wild beasts, is the long-haired one, who knows every desire, a friend sweet and most intoxicating.

7. Vāyu twirled for him, crushed the *kunannamās*, when the long-haired one drank from the cup of poison with Rudra.

This hymn shows us one of the ways in which the mystic experience of visiting the world of the gods may be induced: leaving his body behind, the muni ascends in spirit, being under the influence of some poison. Other ways of inducing similar exhilaration are developed in later times, Yoga practises of retaining the breath, fasting, and otherwise subduing the body, while the religions recognize the validity of the experience and legitimize the methods of achieving it. The next step was inevitable. Convinced that the experiences were genuine, religious adepts believed that they had them *in* the body, not out of it. Thus the religious ecstasy (*samādhi*) provides the basis for belief that the adepts could acquire magic powers, of which levitation is only one.

Defined with some exactitude, levitation appears in the second sutta of the Dīgha Nikāya of the Pali Buddhist canon, one of the oldest suttas, perhaps as old as the third century B. C.,<sup>19</sup> at the most conservative estimate not later than the first century B. C.,<sup>20</sup> and in other suttas of the same Nikāya. There it occurs in a long description of the attainments accompanying progress in the religious life, resulting from the practise of meditation. Well down the line, in fact just before arriving at the state of Nibbāna (Nirvāṇa), the

<sup>19</sup>See Winternitz, *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur*, 2.1.27; and Burlin-game, *Buddhist Parables*, p. xxii.

<sup>20</sup>See Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 20, 24.

adept acquires the Six Supernatural Powers. Of these the first is Magical Power (*iddhi*, Skt. *ṛddhi*), one manifestation of which is walking on the water, and another flying through the air. Magical Power is thus described:<sup>21</sup>

With thoughts thus concentrated, purified, cleansed, stainless, free from contamination, impressionable, tractable, steadfast, immovable, he inclines, he bends down, his thoughts to the acquisition of the various kinds of Magic Power. He enjoys, one after another, the various kinds of magical power, the several varieties thereof:

Being one man, he becomes many men. Being many men, he becomes one man.

He becomes visible; he becomes invisible.

He passes through walls and ramparts and mountains without adhering thereto, as though through the air.

He darts up through the earth and dives down into the earth, as though in the water.

He walks on water without breaking through, as though on land.

He travels through the air cross-legged, like a bird on the wing.

He strokes and caresses with his hand the moon and the sun, so mighty in power, so mighty in strength.

He ascends in the body even to the World of Brahmā.

Such is Magical Power, the first of the Six Supernatural Powers, of which the others are the Heavenly Ear, Mind-reading, Recollection of Previous States of Existence, the Heavenly Eye, and Knowledge of the Means of destroying the Three Contaminations. Here, therefore, we see walking on the water as one of a group of supernatural abilities, with a definite place in a graded enumeration. Nor is walking on the water with the following power, flying through the air, mentioned only here in the Buddhist canonical literature. It appears also in the Majjhima and Aṅguttara Nikāyas of the Pali canon, and in the Ekottarāgama of the Sanskrit,<sup>22</sup> and some Buddhist monks, such as Moggallāna, are especially famous for magic accomplishments.

The Jains as well know such supernatural powers, and have technical names for them (*labdhi*, *śakti*, *ṛddhi*). A description of

<sup>21</sup>Translation from Burlingame, *Buddhist Parables*, p. 252.

<sup>22</sup>For references in the Majjhima, see index to the translation by Lord Chalmers, *Further Dialogues of the Buddha*, s. v. "Psychic power"; Aṅguttara 3.6. For occurrence in the Ekottarāgama, See Edmunds, *Buddhist and Christian Gospels*, 4th ed., vol. 2, p. 30.



them appears in Hemacandra's *Triṣaṣṭiśālākāpuruṣacarita* I. 843-880, where verses 852-862 are of especial interest.<sup>23</sup>

They (certain Jaina sages) were able to reduce themselves into so minute a form that they could pass, like a thread, even through the eye of a needle.

They could heighten their bodies to such an extent that even Mount Sumeru would reach up only to their knees.

They could make the body so light that it was even lighter than air.

The gravity of their bodies surpassed that of Indra's thunderbolt, and hence their strength (i. e., strong blow) could not be borne by the gods Indra and others.

Their power of extension was such that they could touch while standing on earth, the planets or even the top of Mount Meru with their fingers as easily as we touch the leaves of a tree.

Their strength of will was so great that they could walk on water as on land, and could dive into or come out of the ground as if it were water.

Their supernatural powers with regard to worldly glory were such that they could gain for themselves the empire of a *cakravartin* (Universal Monarch) or of an Indra.

Unprecedented was their power by which they brought under control even wild beasts.

Their motion was so irresistible that they could enter into a mountain as easily as into a hole.

Their power of becoming invisible was so unchecked that they could remain invisible to all like the wind.

They were so skilful in assuming different forms at will that they could fill in the space of the universe with their multiple forms.

Again, walking on the water and flying through the air appear in the Yoga system, that great storehouse of magic practise dignified by philosophy and religion. These magic powers (*vibhūti*) are enumerated in the third book of Patañjali's "Yoga Sūtras", especially in sections 16-52, being by-products of Yoga practice, and among them are knowledge of the past and the future, knowledge of the cries of all living beings, knowledge of previous births, knowledge of another's mind-stuff, invisibility, cessation of hunger and thirst, penetration with one's self of another body, possession of the supernal-organ-of-hearing, levitation, and many others. In con-

<sup>23</sup>Translation, with a few minor changes, from Amūlyacharan and Banārsi *Dās Jāin, Jāina Jātakas*, pp. 89 f.

nection with our theme the aphorism 3.42 is noteworthy:<sup>24</sup> "Either as the result of constraint upon the relation between the body and the air (*ākāśa*), or (*ca*) as the result of the balanced-state of lightness, such as that of the cotton-fibre, there follows the passing through air."

While this aphorism does not mention walking on water, the commentary does. Again I quote from the translation by Woods: "Wherever there is a body there is air, because it (air) gives space to the body. The relation (of the body) with this (air) is that of obtaining (pervasion). By performing constraint upon this relation the yogin subjugates the relation with this (air). And gaining the balanced-state of lightness such as that of the cotton-fibre, even to (that of) atoms (of cotton-fibre), he becomes light himself. And by reason of this lightness he walks with both feet upon water. Next after this, however, he walks upon nothing more than a spider's thread, and then upon sunbeams. Thereafter he courses through the air at will."<sup>25</sup> Further, levitation (*laghiman*), with its opposite (*gariman*), is listed among the eight *mahāsiddhis* (super-powers) of the Yogis (see Garbe, *Sāṃkhya and Yoga*, p. 46).

Not only do these passages show us how ancient and how widespread in India are notions of levitation; they also point out the exact status of the art of walking on the water. It is a form of levitation, yet of a lower grade than flying; the more advanced in psychic evolution could fly; the less advanced could only walk on water. This fact needs emphasis, for it explains two things for us. In the first place, it shows us why religious celebrities, particularly the Buddha, do not walk on the water, but rather fly across it, disappear and suddenly reappear on the other side. For this, as far as my observation goes, is the case with the Buddha, the only personage concerning whom I have stories of crossing water

<sup>24</sup>Translation by Woods, *Yoga-System of Patañjali*. The text of Patañjali is considered by Woods to have been "written at some time in the fourth or fifth century of our era" (p. xix); the commentary, which will be quoted below, is even later. Undoubtedly the aphorisms have a tradition much older than the text of Patañjali; but in any case the point need not be regarded as of importance for our purposes here. The antiquity of levitational notions is guaranteed for India by the citations from the R̥gveda and the Buddhist works above.

<sup>25</sup>It is possible that some such power was thought to belong to king Pṛthu Vāinya in *Mahābhārata* 7.69.9: "When he went to sea the waters were quiet; and the mountains gave him a road. The banner of his chariot never fell." This verse has been understood by Roy in his translation to mean that the sea became solid for him and the mountains opened themselves; but I do not believe his rendering justified by the text.

magically that can be demonstrated to come from a remote antiquity. Being fully advanced in the Supernatural Powers he employs the more striking method; it is only lesser beings, lay disciples, that walk on the water. Hence, too, older Buddhist art shows so few illustrations, if any, of walking on the water; for it was devoted almost exclusively to portraying scenes from the Buddha's historical existence or his previous existences, and consequently exhibits scenes in which he flew across water, but none of walking.<sup>26</sup> In the second place, the lower grade of walking on water in the scale of levitational accomplishments explains why it appears so little in later Indian fiction, while flying through the air becomes a theme of indefinite productivity. The greater, more spectacular achievement is so much more widely adaptable for fairy tale purposes and religious legend that it has practically monopolized the field.

In view of the close connection between flying through the air across water and walking on the water, it is pertinent to mention here three instances when the Buddha apparently flew across, particularly since one of these instances may have a relation to the legend of Jesus walking on the water. All three are of great age. The first describes the crossing of the Ganges shortly after the Great Enlightenment. The oldest version for Hīnayāna Buddhism is probably that in the Mahāparinibbāna sutta (No. 16) of the Dīgha Nikāya, which is perhaps from the third century B. C. and certainly no later than the first century B. C.<sup>27</sup> It is as follows:<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Later Buddhism, especially in China and Japan, depicts scenes of crossing the water by walking on its surface or in some analogous manner. Thus Kwan Yin frequently is represented on a lotus or merely on her own feet crossing the ocean. Bodhidharma, the first Chinese patriarch, having occasion to cross the Yang-tsze, does so on a bamboo twig or a reed (for the legend, see in Giles, *Chinese Biographical Dictionary*, under "Bodhidharma"). I have in my possession modern colored prints illustrating these scenes. Similarly in Japan the rishi Chung-li Chūan crosses the sea on a sword: the scene is illustrated by a painting in the British Museum, which is reproduced in Morrison, *The Painters of Japan*; Anderson, *The Pictorial Arts of Japan*; and Binyon, *Japanese Art*, p. 43.. Two paintings by Morikage appear in *Kokka* for November, 1905, of Shoriken crossing the sea on a sword and of a sage with a book riding a carp through the waves; again in *Kokka*, January, 1906, is a picture of the hermit Ch'ing Kao crossing the sea on a carp's back; and two examples of Manjuśrī crossing the water appear in *Kokka*, July, 1926. Somewhat similar ideas appear elsewhere in China outside the Buddhist sphere: Shon Lao and the "eight immortals" have remarkable ways of crossing the sea. Illustrations on Ming pottery appear in R. L. Hobson, *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection, Catalogue of the Chinese, Korean, and Persian Pottery and Porcelain*, vol. IV (London: Benn, 1927), plate XXVII, D147 and plate XXIX, D143.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 20, 25.

<sup>28</sup> Translation following Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha* 3.94.

But the Exalted One went on to the river. And by that time the river Ganges was brimful and overflowing; and wishing to cross to the opposite bank, some began to seek boats, some for rafts of wood, while some made rafts of basket-work. Then the Exalted One as instantaneously as a strong man would stretch forth his arm, or draw it back again when he had stretched it forth, vanished from this side of the river, and stood on the further bank with the company of the brethren.

And the Exalted One beheld the people who wished to cross to the opposite bank looking some of them for boats and some of them for rafts of wood and some of them for rafts of basket-work; and as he beheld them he brake forth at that time into this song:

They who have crossed the ocean drear  
Making a solid path across the pools—  
Whilst the vain world ties its basket rafts—  
These are the wise, these are the saved indeed.

The oldest Mahāyāna version of the legend appears in the *Lalita Vistara* (chapter 26, Lefmann's text, p. 406). This work is preserved for us in a text that is undatable, but we know that there was a text of it in existence about 300 A. D., when it was translated into Chinese as "the second translation of the *Lalita Vistara*".<sup>29</sup> We are therefore ignorant of the age of the work, although many of its materials, such as this story, are of pre-Christian antiquity. The variant there is interesting. The Buddha, after attaining the Great Enlightenment, set out for Benares, where, he says, "I shall create a brilliance without equal for a world that is blind . . . beat the drum of Immortality for a world that knows no sound . . . revolve the Wheel of the Law that has never been revolved in the worlds." Coming from the south, he arrives at the Ganges.

But at that time, monks, the great river Ganges was rolling along full up, level to the banks. Then, monks, the Tathāgata went up to the boatman to be carried across to the other bank. He said, "Gautama, give me the fee for crossing." "My good man," replied the Tathāgata, "I have not the fee for crossing." So saying, he went from that bank to the other bank on a path through the sky.

The legend is one of wide range throughout Buddhist literature in all Buddhist countries.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup>See Winternitz, *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur* 2.1.199.

<sup>30</sup>A few other references are: Mahāvastu (ed. Senart) 3.328, lines 6-14; Avadānaśataka 3.7; Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* 17.7 (allusion only, without narrative); Beal, *The Romantic Legend of Sākya Buddha*, pp. 246 f.; R. Spence Hardy, *A Manual of Buddhism*, pp. 195 f., Bigandet, *The Life or*



The magic power of the Buddha in the midst of water is again attested by a legend that occurs frequently in connection with the conversion of the Jaṭilas, the miracle-working Kāśyapa (Pali, Kassapa) brothers, at Uruvilvā (Pali, Uruvelā) shortly after the Buddha attained enlightenment. The oldest preserved form is in the Vinaya Piṭaka of the Pali canon, Mahāvagga 1.20.16, where it is the last of the miracles preceding the conversion.

Now at that time a great rain fell out of season, and a great flood arose. The place where the Exalted One was dwelling was submerged with water. Then the Exalted One thought, "What if now I should drive away the water roundabout and make my *caṅkrama* (promenade) in the midst thereof on a spot covered with dust".

And then the Exalted One drove away the water roundabout and made his *caṅkrama* in the midst thereof on a spot covered with dust.

Then the Jaṭila Uruvelā Kassapa, fearful lest the Great Samaṇa might be swept away by the water, went in a boat with many Jaṭilas to the place where the Exalted One was dwelling. And the Jaṭila Uruvelā Kassapa, when he saw the Exalted One had driven away the water roundabout and was making his *caṅkrama* in the midst thereof on a spot covered with dust, spoke thus to the Exalted One, "Are you there, Great Samaṇa?"

"This is I, Kassapa," said the Exalted One; and flying through the air he reappeared in the boat.

This legend occurs in other texts and in sculpture. The latter occurrence is most important, for it is found among the bas-reliefs on the eastern gateway to the stupa at Sanchi.<sup>31</sup> In addition, therefore, to the evidence of its pre-Christian existence afforded by its appearance in the Mahāvagga, we have the testimony of archaeology, for that gateway was not later than the first century B. C.<sup>32</sup> The sculpture is reproduced as our frontispiece, and is worth a short

*Legend of Gaudama the Buddha of the Burmese*, p. 149. A sculptured illustration of the miracle appears at Boro Budur; see Krom and Van Erp, *Beschrijving van Barabudur*, vol. I, p. 208; pictured in Series Ia, No. 115; or, Krom, *The Life of Buddha on the Stupa of Barabudur* (1926), p. 125, fig. 115.

<sup>31</sup>First identified by Beal, *The Romantic Legend of Sākya Buddha*, 1875, p. xi, footnote. Beal's note is in connection with a Chinese version of the legend which appears in his translation on p. 302.

<sup>32</sup>Foucher, *The Beginnings of Buddhist Art and Other Essays*, p. 67, would put it in the first or second century B. C. Marshall, writing later and with fuller knowledge of the Sanchi remains, says in the *Cambridge History of India*, Vol. I, p. 627, ". . . the four gateways . . . can hardly be relegated to an earlier date than the last half century before the Christian era."



description. It shows the waves, the three Kāśyapas rowing out to save the Buddha, and the Buddha himself serene amid the floods. The Buddha is not there in a human figure; he is indicated by a smooth rectangular slab below the waves, which is his *caṅkrama* "magic promenade;" for at that period of Buddhist art in Central India he was never represented in sculpture except symbolically.<sup>33</sup>

The third story about the Buddha crossing the water magically appears in the Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga 8.15.<sup>34</sup> and in the story of the present introducing Jātaka 489. The Vinaya occurrence must be pre-Christian. It concerns a visit the Buddha paid with his retinue of monks to the wise Visākhā, "the mother of Migāra", one of the outstanding feminine figures in Buddhist tradition. The night before a mighty rainstorm came that deluged the four quarters of the world, the last such storm, it happened, that was ever to take place. The text gives next a long account of how the Buddha ordered the bhikkhus to expose themselves to this rain, and of how Visākhā sent her maid to invite the holy men to dinner, with a series of stupid mistakes by the maid.

And the Blessed One said to the Bhikkhus: "Make yourselves ready, O Bhikkhus, with bowl and robe; the hour for the meal has come."

"Even so, Lord," said the Bhikkhus in assent to the Blessed One. And in the morning the Blessed One, having put on his undergarment, and being duly bowled and robed, vanished from the Jetavana as quickly as a strong man would stretch forth his arm when it was drawn in, or draw it in again when it was stretched forth, and appeared in the mansion of Visākhā the mother of Migāra. And the Blessed One took his seat on the seat spread out for him, and with the company of the Bhikkhus.

Then said Visākhā the mother of Migāra: "Most wonderful, most marvellous is the might and the power of the Tathāgata, in that though the floods are rolling on knee-deep, and though the floods are rolling on waist-deep, yet is not a single Bhikkhu wet, as to his feet or as to his robes." And glad and exalted in heart she served and offered with her own hand to the company of the Bhikkhus, with the Buddha at their head, sweet food, both hard and soft.

<sup>33</sup> See Foucher, *op. cit.*, p. 19. He has a description of our bas-relief on pp. 99 f. Our scene is on the outer face of the left hand pillar, third panel from the top, but our frontispiece reproduces only the panel concerned. The river Nāirañjanā has risen until it washes the lower branches of the trees, bringing terror to the monkeys but joy to the water birds and a crocodile. In the lower right hand corner is the seat which the Buddha has left to perform the miracle—a rectangular slab under a tree. The bottom center shows the Kāśyapa adoring the Buddha after the miracle is finished.

<sup>34</sup> Translated by Rhys Davids, *Sacred Books of the East* 17.216 ff., from which is taken the quotation below.

Neither this text nor that of Jātaka 489 makes clear whether the Buddha and his bhikkhus walked on the surface of the water or flew through the air, but the suddenness with which they arrive at their destination seems to indicate that they flew.

Here we close the chapter as far as concerns the Buddha. He does not walk on the water; he does not need to. Having complete powers of levitation, he flies across it, and leaves to those who are less perfect the lesser miracle of walking on it. I would call especial attention to the second legend I related, that of the conversion of the Kāśyapas, as illustrated at Sanchi, which seems to bear a relationship to the legend of Jesus walking on the water. I shall take up the point later in this study.

There remains one Buddhist legend showing walking on the water by means of levitation, which is of the utmost importance for the purpose of this study. It is one of a group illustrating the magical crossing of water, but with variation of the means of effecting the miracle, and I shall therefore discuss it in a section devoted to that group alone.

#### D. THE STORY OF YASA AND ITS MUTATIONS

For the purposes of this study the most important group of legends illustrating the theme of walking on the water is one that starts with the story of Yasa, the Buddha's sixth convert. This is one of the oldest bits of Buddhist hagiography and seems to furnish incidents that later became attached to the person of the Buddha himself. It occurs first in the Mahāvagga 1.7.10, where it may well be earlier than 300 B. C.<sup>35</sup> In that version there is no mention of walking on the water. This Yasa was a rich young man of Benares, who lived in luxury and sensual delight with his many wives. Waking one night while they were all asleep, he looked at the unlovely attitudes in which they were lying, noticed their repulsive habits, such as snoring, grinding the teeth, dribbling at the mouth, and became disgusted with sensualism and worldliness in general. Then he gave utterance to the exclamation, "Alas what distress! Alas, what danger!" He put on his gilt slippers and went to the gate of his house. Non-human beings opened the gate, in order that no human being might prevent him from leaving the world and going forth into the houseless state. Then he went

<sup>35</sup>See Winternitz, *Geschichte der Indischen Litteratur*, 2.1.20.

to the gate of the city, and there again non-human beings opened it. Then he went to the deer park of Isipatana at Sarnath, where the Buddha had only recently preached his first sermon. At that time, it being dawn, the Blessed One was walking up and down in the open air, and when he saw Yasa coming he took a seat. The latter approached giving utterance to the solemn exclamation, "Alas, what distress! Alas, what danger!" but the Blessed One answered, "Here is no distress, Yasa; here is no danger. Come here, Yasa, and sit down; I will teach you the law."

The Buddha then converted Yasa. But Yasa's mother began to grieve that her son had gone away and sent his father to seek him. The latter tracked him to the Buddha, of whom he inquired whether or not he had seen Yasa. The Buddha, however, had made Yasa invisible, and when the question was asked he answered evasively. Then he preached to the father, establishing him part way on the road to conversion, after which he made Yasa visible, for now the father would be content to have his son enter the religious life. The father took his son home, and the Buddha came too, converting Yasa's mother and wife, who became the first female lay disciples.

We have already pointed out in section "I. B." that the latter part of this story bears a close resemblance to the later tale of King Kappina and Queen Anojā who crossed rivers by means of an Act of Truth, and this one fact would be enough to make us suspect that the legend of Yasa also contains in its tradition some miraculous feat of crossing water. In fact it does, but not by an Act of Truth. The variants and descendants of this tale exhibit our theme in another guise.

As everyone knows who has gone from Benares to Sarnath, where the Buddha preached his first sermon and where he was residing when Yasa went to visit him, a small stream flows between the two named Varāṇā, the modern Barṇā. The stream is of sufficient depth even in the dry winter months not to be fordable, and when Yasa arrived at its banks, it would naturally provide an obstacle to his further advance. Variants of the legend take this fact into consideration. In the Chinese account, as translated by Beal, the Buddha goes to the bank of the Varāṇā to meet him. Then we read as follows:<sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup>*The Romantic Legend of Sākya Buddha*, pp. 263 f.

. . . Sākra caused a bright light to go before him . . . Yasada advanced slowly to the bank of the river Varanā. Now, at this time the river had suddenly become very shallow, and all along the banks birds were feeding in great numbers; when lo! the light which had gone before him suddenly disappeared, and Yasada was left alone in the gloom. He then began to bewail his unhappy condition, on which Buddha, from the other bank of the river, caused his body to emit a dazzling brightness, and with his arms stretched out towards Yasada, he exclaimed, "Welcome! Welcome, O Yasada! There is nothing to fear here! There is no danger here! Nought but rest and peace and perfect independence!" . . . Yasada, hearing the words of the Buddha, lost every remnant of fear and anxiety, and experienced a sense of complete repose. Then Yasada, filled with joy, took off his jewelled slippers, laid them on the bank, and entered the river Varanā to cross over it; he left them there just as a man who rejects spittle from his mouth leaves it, nor thinks of it again. Then, on account of the shallowness of the water, Yasada soon passed over, and having approached toward the spot where Buddha was, and beholding all the excellencies of his person, he fell down before him in humble adoration and worshipped him. Then, arising, he stood on one side. Hereupon Buddha, having preached to Yasada, and declared to him the character of the four sacred truths, behold, he received enlightenment, and like pure water his heart was cleansed from every remnant of care.

The sequel of this tale is close to the account in the *Mahāvagga* summarized above.

There can be no doubt that a miracle was performed here. The Buddha, going to the bank of the river, made it shallow so that Yasada could cross, and Yasada clearly got across by wading. These two elements at once recall elements in the *Rigvedic* legends of crossing rivers, where Indra makes the river shallow and the Aryans cross by wading (see in section "I. A."), and are therefore simply an expression in a new environment of the oldest manner reported in India for achieving the miracle of crossing water magically.

In another variant Yasa actually walks on water, although not on the way to the Buddha; the incident is transposed. This is in the *Mahāvastu*.<sup>37</sup> As in the *Mahāvagga* it is merely stated that Yaśoda (variant of name Yasa) crossed the Varanā and was converted by the Buddha. It is not stated how he got across, although it is later

<sup>37</sup>Ed. Senart, vol. 3, pp. 401 ff., especially pp. 408-410.



said that his parents, searching for him, found his sandals on the hither bank. But after being converted he obtained the magic powers (*ṛddhi*) enumerated above in section "I. C." and with the consent of the Buddha he exhibited them all to convert a multitude of heretics.<sup>38</sup> Among these "stunts" he "walked on water without breaking through just as on land" (*sayyathāpi nāma udae pi abhidyamāno gacchati tadyathāpi nāma pṛthiviyam*).

The incident of Yasa's crossing the Varāṇā is now extracted from its environment and incorporated in another story of which we have at least two versions recorded. In one of them, a Chinese tale from Indian sources, the hero wades through water, as does Yasa in the Chinese account of his conversion; in the other, a Pali story, he walks on the surface of the water as does Yasa in the Mahāvastu. The Chinese story appears in a commentary on Dharmatrāta's version of the Dhammapada. Dharmatrāta is thought to have lived from about 50 B. C. to 10 A. D. His version of the Dhammapada appears in China in several recensions, the oldest containing merely the stanzas, others expanded with additional material. The oldest of the expanded versions is the Fa kiu p'i yu king "book of parables connected with the book of scriptural texts (i. e., the Dhammapada), and was translated from Indian sources by the monks Fa-kiu and Fa-li between 265 and 316 A. D. Our story is not datable, although Beal (p. 25) thinks it about as old as Dharmatrāta himself. It is as follows.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Cf. in Mahāvagga 5.1.7, where the Buddha allows the venerable Sāgata to perform miracles by the use of Magic Power so that the people honoring him, the disciple, will still more honor the Buddha himself, the Master.

<sup>39</sup>Information about Dharmatrāta and the Chinese versions of his Dhammapada drawn from Beal, *Texts from the Buddhist Canon*, pp. 3 f., and Chavannes, *Cinq cents contes et apologues extraits du Tripitaka Chinois*, vol. 3, p. 309, and supplemented for date from Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 154. Translation following Chavannes, *op. cit.*, vol. 3, pp. 314 ff. There is a less exact translation by Beal, *op. cit.*, section IV, pp. 61 f.

Dr. Burlingame, however, calls my attention to an entry in Bunyiu Nanjio's rare *Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripitaka* (Oxford, 1883), which I have not been able to see. Here our legend seems to be mentioned in the Dharmapadāvadānasūtra composed by Dharmatrāta, whom I have mentioned above, and Dharmatrāta is said to have been the maternal uncle of one Vasumitra. This Vasumitra was one, if not the chief, of the five hundred Arhats who formed the celebrated synod convoked by Kanishka, a monarch whose dates are the subject of great dispute, but at the latest not later than 160 A. D., and now put by Rapson, on the basis of Marshall's excavations at Takṣaśilā, "somewhere about the end of the first century A. D." (*Cambridge History of India*, vol. 1, p. 583). This would make the date of our Buddhist story quite as early as that of Matthew's Gospel. Dr. Burlingame also informs me that Mr. Franklin Hô states that Chavannes's translation of the Chinese text is in-



At one time to the southeast of Chōwei (Śrāvastī) there was a great river with waves deep and wide. On its banks dwelt more than five hundred families, but they had as yet never heard of the practice of wisdom and virtue, which is the salvation of the world. They were given to deeds of violence and endeavored constantly to deceive one another; they were greedy for worldly prosperity and delivered over to their passions; they made themselves merry and fostered intemperate desires.

The Honored of the World continually reflected that they should be saved and that he ought to go save them; he knew that these several families had the good fortune that they ought to be saved. Accordingly then the Buddha went to the river bank and sat down under a tree. The village people, seeing the distinctive mark of the Buddha's glory, were astonished and there was none of them that was not filled with respect: all approached to pay him reverence, some prostrating themselves, others bowing to him, others asking his tidings. The Buddha ordered them to be seated and expounded for them the teaching of the scriptures. When these people heard him speak, they believed him not at all; they were, indeed, accustomed to deceit and carelessness, and to the words of truth they did not add faith.

The Buddha then miraculously created a man coming from the south of the river; his feet walked upon the water, and it was only just as if he sank to the ankle. He came before the Buddha, bowed his head to the ground, and worshipped him.

All the people had witnessed this, and there was not one who was not wonderstruck. They asked the miraculous man, "Our families, from our earliest ancestors, have dwelt on the bank of this river. Now we have never heard tell that a man walked upon the water. Who then are you, and what is your magic recipe for walking upon the water without sinking?"

The miraculous man answered them, "I am a simple and ignorant man from the south of the river. Having heard say that the Buddha was here, I was anxious to gladden myself with his wisdom and virtue. When I arrived at the southern bank, it was not the time when the river was fordable; but I asked the people who were on the bank of the river what was the depth of the water. They replied that the water would reach to my ankle, and that nothing would prevent me from crossing. I added faith to their words, and I have

correct. The correct translation in paragraph 3 of my translation below is "the Buddha took the form of a man," not "miraculously created a man. He adds, 'The Chinese symbol is the same that is used to denote the *nirmāṇakāya*, the 'magic body' " (see Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 271-272). I have not ventured, however, to change Chavannes's translation; the point is after all not of major consequence in this connection.

therefore come crossing the river. I have no extraordinary recipe."

The Buddha praised him, saying, "Well done! Well done! Truly, the man with faith in the absolute truths is able to cross the gulf of births and deaths. What is there extraordinary about it then that he should be able to cross a river several *li* wide." Then the Buddha pronounced these stanzas: "Faith (*śraddhā*) can cross the gulf. . . ."

While this story is not the story of Yasa, it owes much to it, and may be considered to be in its line of tradition. So too another tale, which has an intimate relation with the Chinese legend. This is the celebrated story of the present introducing Jātaka 190, which has often been compared with the story of Peter walking on the water, but as far as I am aware has never before been fixed in its Indian environment. It is as follows:<sup>40</sup>

*Behold the fruit of faith!* This parable was related by the Teacher while he was in residence at Jetavana monastery. At eventide he reached the bank of the river Aciravatī, after the boatman had beached his boat and gone to hear the preaching of the Doctrine.

Not seeing a boat, he had recourse to the Practice of Meditation, concentrated his thoughts on the Buddha, attained the Ecstasy of Joy, and descended into the river. His feet did not sink in the water. He walked along as though he were walking on the surface of the land until he came to mid-stream. Then he saw waves. Then the Ecstasy of Joy, the result of the concentration of his thoughts on the Buddha, became weak. Then his feet began to sink. But he concentrated his thoughts anew on the Buddha, strengthened the Ecstasy of Joy, walked on the surface of the water as before, entered Jetavana monastery, bowed to the Teacher, and sat down on one side.

The Teacher exchanged greetings with him, and asked: "Lay disciple, I trust that as you came hither, you came hither without weariness." "Reverend Sir, I had recourse to the Practice of Meditation, concentrated my thoughts on the Buddha, attained the Ecstasy of Joy, obtained support on the surface of the water, and came hither as though I were treading the earth."

The incident then affords the Buddha an opportunity to tell an old world story of mariners whose recourse to the virtues brought them safety in time of danger.

The translation I have quoted should be noticed for one point in particular. The words in the third and fourth paragraphs, "he had

<sup>40</sup>Translation by Burlingame, *Buddhist Parables*, p. 186.

recourse to the Practice of Meditation, concentrated his thoughts on the Buddha, attained the Ecstasy of Joy," are a fulsome but correct translation by Burlingame of the Pali *buddhārammaṇaṃ pītiṃ gahetvā*, a phrase which most other translators have not rendered correctly. The "Ecstasy of Joy (*pīti*)" is the first of the four trances (*jhāna*) or Ecstasies, that which is accompanied by joy and ease (*pīti-sukha*); and it is these trances that bring to the adept the Magical Powers, of which walking on the water is one (see above in section "I. C.").<sup>41</sup>

Jātaka-book another Buddhist doctrine makes its appearance, namely faith (*śraddhā*, Pali *saddhā*). Although we cannot say that the Buddha emphasized this doctrine, we know it is quite old in Buddhism: "faith is the means by which a man may cross the depths of the river of existence to the safety of Nirvāṇa; the teaching of the Buddha saves him who has faith, but destroys the faithless". Faith and reason operate together for him who would lead the religious life and be saved.<sup>42</sup> The Chinese version speaks only of faith; the Jātaka is more consistent; it fills in the gap; by means of faith in the Buddha one can meditate upon him and attain the *jhānas* (Ecstasies)—in fact the Buddha, the Dhamma (Law), and the Order are formally listed among the Ten Reflections that aid one to attain Ecstasy—and by means of the *jhānas* one attains Magic Power.

The text in which the Jātaka story is found cannot be dated earlier than the fifth century A. D., a fact which has often been unduly emphasized;<sup>43</sup> for the truth is, as we now see, that the elements of the tale are drawn from exceedingly ancient sources, and the tale itself is the culmination of a long legendary tradition. In view of these facts, we have good reason to accept the implication of the Pali text that the story, so well grounded, is ancient; it

<sup>41</sup>For an inadequate translation, see in E. J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History* (1927), p. 241—"finding joy in making Buddha the object of his meditation."

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy*, pp. 34 f., from whom I have made the quotation. Keith gives appropriate references to the Pali Scriptures.

<sup>43</sup>Cf. the rather cavalier treatment this story receives from Kennedy, *JRAS*, 1917, p. 528, and from Hopkins, *History of Religions*, p. 195 and p. 196, footnote, who refers to this, without specifically naming it, as one of the "four 'parallels' now recognized by Garbe," of which "two are not found till c. 500 A. D."—these are presumably the feeding of the multitude and the walking on the water—"a third may be as late"—presumably the Angel Chorus and presentation to Simeon—"and the fourth (the temptation) is of a very general character."

certainly could have been; and since the Jātakas, like most Indian works, are absolutely devoid of any consciousness of time or textual historicity, we may more easily accept their implication here than reject it.

#### E. SUMMARY OF THE THEME AS IT APPEARS IN INDIA

The investigation we have made so far justifies the following conclusions:

1. Walking on the water is only one of several ways of crossing water magically that have been recognized in India, and in stories have been interchangeable. The ways are: (*a*) with the help of a deity, first occurrence in the Rīgveda; (*b*) by means of the magic power of truth, known long before the Christian era; (*c*) by the psychic power of levitation, of which walking on the water is the lower form, while flying through the air is the higher, also found before the Christian era; (*d*) with the aid of the Buddha. The manner of crossing water is: (*a*) wading through water that has miraculously become shallow; (*b*) flying across it; or (*c*) walking on its surface.

2. The chief of the pre-Christian stories illustrating the theme are Buddhist; and in them the Buddha never walks on the water, he only flies across it, or disappears and reappears in another place. It is lesser persons who walk upon its surface.

3. The important story of the lay disciple in the story of the present introducing Jātaka 190 is not an isolated legend, but is composed of elements, some of which come from the earliest antiquity in India, and represents a continuous, yet cumulative, tradition from before 800 B. C. In its final form, in spite of the late date of the literary redaction of the text in which it appears, there is more reason to believe it pre-Christian than post-Christian.





PART II

NON-CHRISTIAN LITERATURE  
OF THE WEST



## II. WALKING ON WATER IN THE NON-CHRISTIAN LITERATURE OF WESTERN ASIA AND EUROPE

IN the literature of western Asia and of Europe, as far as my observation extends, stories illustrating the magical crossing of water set their scenes in Egypt, western Asia, or India. I speak, of course, only of stories that are pre-Christian or seem to be so. An exception must be made in favor of Poseidon in the opening of Iliad XIII, who drives his chariot across the waves, much as at a later time did King Dilipa in the Mahābhārata (see above, footnote 3). The deed of Poseidon might possibly be thrown out of court because he, being god of the sea, is by definition its master and may proceed at pleasure on its surface or under it. Yet the incident could not be so lightly brushed aside if it could be shown to be connected with other legends of crossing water magically. Such too, is the case with the later stories of water sprites, wraiths, ghosts which are adduced by Saintyves.<sup>44</sup> Such creatures, being bodiless or immaterial, may also glide across the water or float through the air. The pre-Christian belief in such beings is attested by the very story of Jesus walking on the water; for when his disciples saw him, they did not know him, but mistook him for a ghost and were frightened. There is after all nothing magical in the actions of these unreal creatures any more than there is in that of Poseidon; the magic part is a part of their nature; and the stories would be germane to our investigation only if it seemed that they had in any way inspired the stories that portray men performing the miracle.

The stories west of India are not so easily based upon definite metaphysical notions as in India, but they may be assorted according to the manner in which the crossing is effected. There is one

<sup>44</sup>Essay on the miracle of crossing water in *Essais de folklore biblique*.

group in which the waters divide, another in which they are lowered, and a third in which there is walking on water. Obviously, there is no need to consider stories such as that of Icarus in which crossing the water is purely incidental to some other motif—in that case the motif of flying to heaven and too near the sun.

### A. THE WATERS DIVIDE

The dividing of the waters so that it is possible to pass between them on dry land is characteristically a Jewish notion. It appears in connection with the exodus from Egypt, the entry into Canaan under Joshua, and the miracles of Elijah and Elisha. The oldest, and the source of the others, is that of Moses conducting the Israelites through the Red Sea.

And Jehovah said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward. And lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thy hand over the sea and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go into the midst of the sea on dry ground. . . . And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and Jehovah caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. . . . And Jehovah said unto Moses, Stretch out thy hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and Jehovah overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, even all the host of Pharaoh that went in after them into the sea; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.—Exodus xiv. 15-29, with some omissions.

This account is generally taken as a hybrid: one version shows the crossing effected by having the waters divide through the magic power of Moses' rod; the other and older, rationalistically, by an

east wind that drives the water back, apparently leaving the ground dry without division of the waters.

Inspired by this legend is that of Joshua leading the Israelites through the Jordan.

And Jehovah said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the waters of the Jordan, ye shall stand still in the Jordan. And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of Jehovah your God. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, . . . Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, for every tribe a man. And it shall come to pass, when the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of Jehovah, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, even the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand in one heap. And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over the Jordan, the priests that bare the ark of the covenant being before the people; and when they that bare the ark were come unto the Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (for the Jordan overfloweth all its banks all the time of the harvest), that the waters which came down from above stood, and rose up in one heap, a great way off, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethán; and those that went down toward the sea of Arabah, even the Salt Sea, were wholly cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of Jehovah stood firm on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan; and all Israel passed over on dry ground, until all the nation were passed clean over the Jordan. And it came to pass, when all the nation were clean passed over the Jordan, that Jehovah spake unto Joshua, saying, Take you twelve men out of the people, out of every tribe a man, and command ye them, saying, Take you hence out of the midst of the Jordan, out of the place where the priests' feet stood firm, twelve stones and carry them over with you, and lay them down in the lodging place, where ye shall lodge this night. Then Joshua called the twelve men, whom he had prepared of the children of Israel, out of every tribe a man: and Joshua said unto them, Pass over before the ark of Jehovah your God into the midst of the Jordan, and take you up every man of you a stone upon his shoulder, according to



the number of the tribes of the children of Israel; that this may be a sign among you, that, when your children ask you in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? then ye shall say unto them, Because the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of Jehovah; when it passed over the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel forever. And the children of Israel did so as Joshua commanded, and took up twelve stones out of the midst of the Jordan, as Jehovah spake unto Joshua, according to the number of the tribes of the children of Israel; and they carried them over with them unto the place where they lodged, and laid them down there. And Joshua set up twelve stones in the midst of the Jordan, in the place where the feet of the priests that bare the ark of the covenant stood: and they are there unto this day. For the priests that bare the ark stood in the midst of the Jordan, until everything was finished that Jehovah commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hastened and passed over. And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of Jehovah passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people. . . . On that day Jehovah magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life. And Jehovah spake unto Joshua, saying, Command the priests that bear the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of the Jordan. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of the Jordan. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of Jehovah were come up out of the midst of the Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry ground, that the waters of the Jordan returned unto their place, and went over all its banks, as aforetime.—Joshua iii. 7—iv. 18, with some omissions.

This long story is not merely an account of how the Israelites crossed the Jordan through the magic power of the ark of the covenant, but also a "just so" explanation of how the twelve stones came to be set up in Gilgal (Joshua iv. 20).

The third Jewish legend is of Elijah crossing the Jordan before his translation to heaven. He seems to cross it at the spot where the Israelites crossed it under Joshua, for he proceeds from Gilgal to Jericho to the river, reversing the route of their entry.

And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha,

Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up in a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof! And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces. He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they were divided hither and thither, and Elisha went over.—II Kings ii. 8-14.

In all three of these stories the miracle is accomplished by a simple and unreflective bit of folk magic. Certain articles have acquired a magic power, by means of which this and other wonders are achieved. The power does not lie in the individual wielding the articles; there is no higher religious basis for it, no doctrinal authority; nothing but the commonest and most elementary ideas of magic.

This group of legends in the Old Testament is not, as far as I can see, to be traced back to any other stories of crossing water magically. As a group they are independent.<sup>45</sup> But they have had influence on many later legends, one of which is old enough to come under our inspection. This is a Zoroastrian tale found in Yasht 5. 76-78, the Ardvīsūr Yašt, a text which the vicissitudes of the Zoroastrian canon have made undatable, although it would not be unconservative to put it before the Christian era. Vistarav, having escaped the massacre of his family, arrives at the river Vītaṇuhaitī; and there he invokes Ardvī Sūra Anāhita.

<sup>45</sup> It seems to me to be futile to try to connect these legends with the ancient Egyptian tale of King Snefru and his magician Zazamonkh. A convenient English rendering appears in Erman, *The Literature of the Ancient Egyptians*, translated from the German by A. M. Blackman (New York: Dutton, 1927), pp. 38ff. One of the girl rowers of King Snefru's barge loses a malachite ornament in the water. The magician Zazamonkh lifts up the water from one side in a block, which he piles upon the water of the other side, recovers the ornament, and then replaces the water. The motivation and incidents are too dissimilar to justify making a connection.

"This is truly, veraciously stated, O mighty, immaculate Ardvī, that as many demon worshippers have been stricken to the ground by me as I have hairs on my head. Therefore, O mighty, immaculate Ardvī provide me then a dry passage over the good Vitanuhaiti."

Up came the mighty, immaculate Ardvī in the form of a beauteous maiden, very strong . . . <sup>46</sup> The waters on one side she made stand still, the others she made flow on. She provided him a dry passage over the good Vitanuhaiti.<sup>47</sup>

Two features of this legend are noteworthy. First, the manner of crossing is between divided waters as in the Hebrew crossing of the Red Sea, or even better that of the Jordan, where, as here, the upper waters stood still, and the lower flowed on. To this degree, therefore, it seems influenced by the Jewish legends; and the borrowing may well have taken place at the time when the Jews were in captivity at Babylon. The Zoroastrian could scarcely be the source of the Hebrew. For one thing we have no evidence that it is as old as the Hebrew; and for another the Hebrew story of the Exodus has such a hold on the Jewish imagination, both in the Old Testament and in the New, as well as in commemorative celebration down to the present that it seems more likely to have been the original than does the Zoroastrian, which cuts very little figure in its environment.

Second, the crossing is by means of prayer, in which respect it differs from the Hebrew. The form in which the prayer is made is almost the formula of the Hindu Act of Truth (see above section "I. B."), and might afford basis for believing that the Zoroastrian tale is partly traceable to Indian sources. The theory would find further support of a negative character in the fact that such a magic use of the truth does not seem to be characteristically Zoroastrian, as it is Hindu or Buddhist or Jain. These considerations are not conclusive, since the Iranian story itself is not to be derived from any Indian story I have seen. Two other explanations offer themselves. Such a use of the truth may be common Indo-Iranian, and may have been preserved independently in the two branches. This is hardly likely on account of two considerations: first, the great infrequency of the idea among the Iranians and second, its relatively late appearance in Indian literature. In the latter it seems to be a development from other notions (see above). The second explanation

<sup>46</sup>Omitting a stock description of Ardvī.

<sup>47</sup>Translation following Wolff, *Avesta* . . . *übersetzt*, p. 175.

is that it is also an Iranian development from other indigenous notions. In Zoroastrianism, as in the religion of the Veda, prayer as the due repetition of formulae has a magic power.<sup>48</sup> To cross a river in such circumstances one might well resort to prayer, as did Zarathushtra in a story which we shall consider a little later.<sup>49</sup> Also, the act by which Vistarav influences the goddess is one of the greatest piety, namely, the slaughter of demon worshippers, and it may well be the piety of his act more than the truthfulness of the statement that is effective. The question, however, had perhaps better be left unanswered.

An echo of the crossing of the Jordan from about the time of Christ is reported by Josephus, *Antiquities* XX.5.2, concerning a certain Theudas, who induced a large number of people to follow him to the Jordan, claiming that he was a prophet and would divide the waters. But when the test came, the miracle did not take place; so Theudas was captured and carried to the governor in Jerusalem, who had his head struck off.

#### B. THE WATERS BECOME SHALLOW

The stories of rivers or bodies of water suddenly becoming fordable are in western Asia invariably attached to historical personages, and in many cases seem more credible than does the story of crossing the Śutudrī and Vipās in Rīgveda 3.33. Some of them seem to have a germ of truth in them, that is, a general with his army found a river, usually the Euphrates, fordable at a time of the year when it usually is not; this lucky coincidence was interpreted as a bit of heavenly favor, and the occurrence was transmuted into a miracle. The whole process is illustrated in Xenophon's *Anabasis* 1.4, when Cyrus and his army crossed the Euphrates at Thapsacus.

And in the crossing, no one was wetted above the breast by the water. The people of Thapsacus said that this river had never been passable on foot except at this time, but only by boats. . . . It seemed, accordingly, that there was divine intervention, and that the river had plainly retired before Cyrus because he was destined to be king.

If this were so, then heaven was merely trying to make mad him whom it meant ultimately to destroy. But the statement of the Thapsacans was not altogether true, "since in the late autumn and

<sup>48</sup>See Moulton, *The Treasure of the Magi*, pp. 89 ff.

<sup>49</sup>For a few references to crossing a river by means of religious act, performed or implied, and even of prayer, see in Jackson, *Zoroaster* p. 40, n. 6.



early winter the river is often fordable. It is to be remembered, however, that the Greeks crossed between the middle and the end of July, at a time when the river is usually at flood height. From the end of May until towards the middle of July the waters stand about thirteen feet above low water."<sup>50</sup> One hardly likes to impugn Xenophon's reliability concerning an occurrence of which he was presumably an eye-witness, and it is not necessary to do so. We need only suppose that the river subsided a little earlier that year; hence the lucky accident that is on the way to becoming a miracle.

But we need not be so charitable in our judgment of a legend concerning Lucullus that appears in Plutarch's life of him (24). Lucullus reached the Euphrates at a time when it was greatly swollen by late rains. But that very evening the floods began to subside and the next morning the river was lower than normal, showing islands that were seldom visible at all. The intervention of the deity in his behalf was evident from the fact that on the opposite bank waiting for him to take and sacrifice was a heifer sacred to the Persian Diana, an animal that Plutarch tells us was as a rule difficult to find. Here the incident, if it ever occurred, has been exaggêrated and expanded into a modest miracle.

Tacitus (Annals 6.37) tells how Vitellius made a similar crossing of this singularly accommodating river. The final effect of these legends is to leave one a little incredulous of them all. It looks very much as though some ancient legend of crossing the Euphrates—perhaps akin to the story of Vistarav—had colored the accounts of the historians.

Alexander, the hero of much fairy tale, figures in some marvellous affairs with the waters, of which one is the passage of the sea in Pamphylia. Most of the accounts are touched with credibility. Arrian in his *Anabasis of Alexander* 1.26 says that there is no passage along the beach except when the north wind blows: "at that time, after a strong south wind, the north winds blew, and rendered his passage easy and quick, not without divine intervention, as both he and his men interpreted." Plutarch in his life of Alexander (17) refers to the same legend and quotes Menander in connection with it, but adds that Alexander himself made no claim of anything miraculous in the passage. Appian also knew the

<sup>50</sup>Mather and Hewitt, *Xenophon's Anabasis*, Books I-IV, p. 267, quoting from Rogers, *History of Babylonia and Assyria*.



legend and in his *Civil Wars* 2.149, 150, mentions it in connection with an adventure of Caesar's in the Ionian Sea; and Strabo, in *Geogr.* XIV.3.9, says the army was a whole day in passing and was in water up to the navel. Callisthenes, however, according to Eustathius (notes on 3rd Iliad of Homer) says that the sea not only opened for him but even rose and fell in homage, although it is only fair to say that this statement is not necessarily to be interpreted thus literally but may be looked upon as a kind of rhetorical embellishment to something which was actually understood more prosaically. Josephus gives the event an undeniably miraculous touch. In the *Antiquities* II.16.5, having just described the Hebrew crossing of the Red Sea, he cites this legend in confirmation of that in Exodus, and says that the sea divided for Alexander, in an off-hand way referring to the other historians as his authority. The legend is probably independent of any other, being based on an unusual but perfectly natural occurrence, to which later commentators added miraculous interpretation. In the case of Josephus' account, it has been clearly contaminated by the Hebrew legend.

### C. WALKING ON THE WATER

There are in the West no stories of actually crossing on the surface of the water that can be convincingly ascribed to pre-Christian times, nor even any allusions to the feat at so early a date. Nevertheless there are at least three stories which *might* be that old, if we only knew, and these it is worth while to mention.

The first concerns Alexander again, and is found in the Pseudo-Callisthenes.<sup>51</sup> When Alexander arrived at Babylon, he himself went in disguise as an ambassador to Darius, who received and entertained him, notably with a banquet in the evening. During the course of the banquet a certain Persian lord recognized Alexander and informed Darius; whereupon Alexander, finding himself discovered, fled from the hall, snatching a torch to light him through the darkness. Fortunately, he chanced upon a horse at the door. The Syriac text then says, "Now Alexander by the might of the Gods crossed the river, but when he had reached the other side and the fore-feet of the horse rested on dry land, the water which had been frozen over suddenly melted, and the hind legs of the horse went down into the river. Alexander, however, leaped from the horse to land, and the horse was drowned in the river."

<sup>51</sup>Greek version, Book II.15; Syriac, Book II.7. The latter is translated by Budge, *The History of Alexander the Great*, p. 74.

This story, being about Alexander and appearing among the fairy tales of the Pseudo-Callisthenes, is at once to be suspected of Indian origin. It might, on the one hand, be a reflection of the Indian stories of crossing magically on the surface of the water, as by King Kappina and Queen Anoja (above in section "I. B.") or by King Dilipa (footnote 3); or, on the other hand, of Siddhārtha's celebrated leap across the river Anomā on his steed Kanthaka, when he left home on the Great Retirement to become the Buddha.<sup>52</sup> The age of the earliest version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes is probably not greater than 200 A. D.,<sup>53</sup> and no text that we have reproduces the original; yet this incident must be of considerable antiquity, for it is well established in the cycle; and it may even be pre-Christian.

The second story appears in Nonnus, Dionysiaca 23. Although Nonnus flourished about 395-405 A. D.,<sup>54</sup> the legend of a mythical invasion of India by Dionysus, carrying civilization to that country, is pre-Christian. As early as Euripides (prologue to the *Bacchae*), myth had carried him as far as Bactria, which at that time was both culturally and politically Indian.

Leaving the Lydian and the Phrygian plain  
Teeming with gold, I neared the sun-scorched tracts  
Of Persia and the walls of Bactria.<sup>55</sup>

Arrian, *Indica* 5, 7, 8, 9, reports the invasion, presumably on the authority of Megasthenes, although he says nothing about crossing rivers on the surface of the water. Nonnus, however, uses this, as well as other material which seems attributable, perhaps indirectly, to Indian sources, such, for example, as his distortion of the Indian notions of rebirth (37.3). The incident that interests us is related in a florid, decadent style, with embellishments that doubtless originated with Nonnus, but the substance of it is that the bacchantes, having triumphed over the eastern barbarians, cross the river Hydaspes (the modern Jhelum, the river at which Alexander met Porus) with various nautical wonders. They drive their chariots over the waves, and the feet of the leopards do not sink in;

<sup>52</sup>This incident is thoroughly commonplace among the Buddhists; for a convenient example, see in the *Nidānakathā*, translated by Warren, *Buddhism in Translations*, p. 65. Hardly germane are stories of horses that run on water, as in the 1001 Nights, or that go so swiftly they do not sink in water, as in *Jātakas* 254 and 545.

<sup>53</sup>See Budge, *op. cit.*, p. lii.

<sup>54</sup>See Chamberlayne in the North Carolina University *Studies in Philology* 13.41.

<sup>55</sup>See Davis, *The Asiatic Dionysus*, p. 163.

Pan's goat feet run over the waters, which flatten themselves out; and so with many others of Dionysus' army. Similar incidents occur in Nonnus' chapter 24. These incidents all seem quite reasonably to be ascribable to Indian sources, both on account of the manner of crossing the water, as well as on account of the Indian setting.

The third story is from a still later text, being an Iranian legend about Zarathushtra, appearing in the Zerdusht Nama, chapter 17, dated 1278 A. D. It tells how Zarathushtra, having arrived with his family at the bank of the Araxes, found no boat. He was grieved lest his wives should be exposed naked to the gaze of the multitude on shore; but he prayed to the Lord, and then they all walked across safely on the water. What the age of this tradition is, no one can hope to guess; for the books of the Parsis suffered such destruction that much original or early material no longer is preserved and we cannot check late reports, such as this, by the first canon. The fact that Zarathushtra and his family *walked on the surface of the water* would lend plausibility to the theory that Indian influence is felt here.

#### D. SUMMARY

So far as concerns the theme of walking on water, the conclusions to be drawn from our discussion of crossing water magically in western Asia are largely negative. The oldest legends show the waters dividing under the control of a magic object; this is varied by prayer; or, again, the waters are lowered. There are no stories exhibiting walking on the surface of the water which can with assurance be considered pre-Christian, while the few which may not unreasonably be so seem with great plausibility to be ascribable to Indian origins.



PART III

CHRISTIAN GOSPELS





### III. WALKING ON WATER IN THE CHRISTIAN GOSPELS

IN the Christian New Testament there are two legends of walking on the surface of the water, one concerning Christ, appearing three times; and the other concerning Peter, appearing only once and then as an interpolation in one of the examples of the former. The older legend is clearly that concerning Christ, appearing without the interpolation in the Gospels of Mark and John.<sup>56</sup>

And straightway he constrained his disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before him unto the other side to Bethsaida, while he himself sendeth the multitude away. And after he had taken leave of them, he departed into the mountain to pray. And when even was come, the boat was in the midst of the sea, and he alone on the land. And seeing them distressed in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them, about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking on the sea; and he would have passed by them: but they, when they saw him walking on the sea, supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw him, and were troubled. But he straightway spake with them, and saith unto them, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And he went up unto them into the boat; and the wind ceased: and they were sore amazed in themselves.—Mark vi. 45-51.

And when evening came, his disciples went down unto the sea; and they entered into a boat and were going over the sea unto Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. And the sea was rising by reason of a great wind that blew. When therefore they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they behold Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the boat; and they were afraid. They were willing therefore to receive him into the boat: and straightway the boat was at the land whither they were going.—John vi. 16-21.

<sup>56</sup>John is usually considered secondary to Mark, although there is some scholarly opinion to the effect that it is independent and equally old. See Montgomery, *The Origin of the Gospel According to St. John* (Philadelphia: Winston, 1923), especially on p. 30, where the conclusions are stated. In any case both accounts are of the same story.

The story concerning Peter appears only in Matthew. It is a matter of general acceptance in New Testament criticism that the compiler of the Gospel according to Matthew used Mark's account, and added material, notably some that was Petrine.<sup>57</sup> In line with this practice is the intrusion of the episode concerning Peter walking on the water. With only the slightest effort we can perceive where Mark's narrative was interrupted, the new legend inserted, and the original narrative resumed. The paragraphing below shows it all very clearly.

And straightway he constrained the disciples to enter into the boat, and to go before him unto the other side, till he should send the multitudes away. And after he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into the mountain apart to pray: and when even had come he was there alone. But the boat was now in the midst of the sea, distressed by the waves; for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night he came unto them, walking upon the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking upon the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a ghost; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid.

And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee upon the waters. And he said, Come. And Peter went down from the boat, and walked upon the waters to come to Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and took hold of him, and saith unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?

And when they were gone up into the boat, the wind ceased. And they that were in the boat worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.—Matthew xiv. 22-33.

Matthew's attitude toward Peter is in general favorable: Peter is a hero to be magnified.<sup>58</sup> Such is the final effect of this passage. Although Peter loses his faith, sinks in the water, and is rebuked by Jesus, nevertheless he is the only one of the disciples who can imitate the Master at all in this miracle; and for that reason he is superior to the rest. It would have been easy enough to omit refer-

<sup>57</sup>For example, Peter's payment of the temple tribute for Christ and himself with the coin from the fish's mouth (xvii.24-27); the committal of the power of the keys (xviii.17 f.). See Bacon, *The Making of the New Testament*, p. 146.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. Bacon, *op. cit.*, pp. 146 f.

ence to the temporary lapse of faith, in which case the superiority would have been even greater. That Matthew did not do so is evidence of his good faith, showing that he did not fabricate the story himself, and making it unlikely that it came to exist as propaganda consciously created by some hero-worshipping follower of Peter. It is an indication of fidelity to tradition, even at the expense of preserving an element somewhat discreditable to the hero.





PART IV

INDIAN AND CHRISTIAN LEGENDS



#### IV. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE INDIAN AND THE CHRISTIAN LEGENDS

##### A. NO INDEPENDENT ORIGIN OF THE CHRISTIAN EXAMPLES

THE question now arises as to whether or not the Indian and the Christian legends are related, and, if they are, which group has provided the source of the other. There are really only two possibilities: either the two groups have no genetic connection, or the Christian are borrowed from the Indian. We have no materials whatever to make us believe that the Indian might have been borrowed from the Christian; the superior antiquity of the mere notion of walking on the water in India ought in itself to settle that point, while the almost equally evident superior antiquity of the introduction to Jātaka 190, the "parallel" to the Petrine story, clinches the matter.<sup>59</sup> We have, therefore, first of all to consider the possibility that the Christian Gospel legends may have originated independently in their environment, and discuss the various explanations that have been or might be offered to establish this thesis.

One explanation would be to accept the Gospel accounts as literally true or as being miraculous and uncritical exaggerations of incidents that actually occurred. These ideas do not seem to me to demand our attention. A second explanation would seek to find the materials out of which these legends grew in pre-Christian Palestinian belief or legend. This effort falls to the ground. In the first place there is

<sup>59</sup> If my discussion does nothing else it ought at least to refute finally the impossible conclusion reached by Kennedy, *JRAS*, 1917, pp. 217, 258, that the Indian is borrowed from the Christian. That article is accepted by E. J. Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History*, 1927, p. 287, as being one of the two treatments containing "the most sober judgments on the question." Thomas himself appears not to have gone far into the matter, and does not seem to know Haas's bibliography (see my footnote No. 1); at least his own bibliography makes no mention of it. So, too, in discussing the Widow's Mite (p. 240) he makes no reference to Haas's essay (see my footnote No. 1).

nothing in known Jewish lore to furnish a basis for them. The Old Testament stories which have been reproduced above in full cannot have any possible connection with those in the New Testament; the differences are too marked. The Old Testament feats are accomplished by the use of a low grade of folk magic, the New Testaments feats by some inner grace of the performers; in the Old Testament stories the waters divide or roll back and the people cross over on dry land, in the New Testament the waters remain unaffected and the men merely walk on their surface. The Old Testament legends were always in the fore-front of Jewish consciousness, as one can see from glancing at the many allusions to them in the Psalms, Isaiah, and the New Testament itself, or from noting the story in Josephus, which I have mentioned above; and an imitation of them would be bound to be close and obvious. So, too, no passages in the Old Testament illustrate any notion that could have been the source of the idea of walking on the water. The nearest possibility is Job ix. 8, referring to Jehovah.<sup>60</sup> The American revision translates:

That alone stretcheth out the heavens,  
And treadeth upon the waves of the sea.

This translation is, to say the least, uncertain. Battenwieser, *Book of Job*, translates, "Who spread out the heavens and hath dominion over the billows of the sea." C. J. Hall, *Job*, adopting a different manuscript reading, has the passage refer to the tops of the mountains. But even accepting the traditional text and translation, Driver and Gray, in their volume on Job, in the *International Critical Commentary*, take the passage to refer to Jehovah as a storm god and seem to see in it no reference to walking on the water. In any case the passage affords no point of departure for a legend. The most that could reasonably be claimed for it is that it might have put those who valued it in a state of mind that rendered them receptive to the idea of walking on the water when once it was at last presented to them. Precise references to walking on the water that can be adduced from non-Jewish literature of Syria or the regions nearby are all post-Christian and are therefore out of court in this connection; for every one of them is liable to have been influenced

<sup>60</sup>Isaiah xliii. 2 and 16; Psalms lxxvii. 19, and cxxxvi. 13-15 refer to the passage of the Red Sea, as do many other passages. Job xxxviii. 16 and Sirach xxiv. 6 have to do with matters "in the recesses of the deep".

by the Gospel stories.<sup>61</sup> Even if some day we should chance to find the phenomenon alluded to in literature that is indisputably pre-Christian, we should have to proceed most cautiously before basing any conclusions upon the occurrence.

There is no greater evidence to show that the stories arise from an accretion to the character of Jesus of the characteristics of various local water divinities.<sup>62</sup> We cannot enumerate these deities nor point to any legends that would serve as a prototype for the Christian legends. Even weaker is the suggestion that Christ's feat reflects stories connected with apparitions of ghosts and wraiths that the night mist and a tricky eye caused one to see floating over the water.<sup>62</sup> It was a ghost that the disciples first thought Jesus was. But the notion is not entertainable. There are no stories of ghosts reported from pre-Christian times that are similar to the New Testament legends. The fact is that the Gospel stories of walking on the water cannot reasonably be connected with anything preceding them in the reported lore and literature of Western Asia.

A third method of explanation might be to base these two legends on other Gospel material. This is difficult, but proceeds along the following lines. It has been suggested that the legend of Jesus walking on the water is a doublet and extension of the legend of the stilling of the tempest (Matthew viii. 18 and 23-27; Mark

<sup>61</sup>Cf. Dion Chrysostom 3.30 (elsewhere he writes of Indians whom he had seen); Lucian, Philopseudes 13; Papyrus Berolinensis 1.120; Gaster, *Sword of Moses*, p. 43 (No. 125), p. 46 (No. 3); Odes of Solomon 39. Consult Reitzenstein, *Hellenistische Wundererzählungen*, p. 125; Abt, *Die Apologie des Apuleius*, p. 129. For a number of later Jewish legends concerning water and power obtained over it by men see Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 12, pp. 713, 714. In that article is much valuable information, mostly post-Christian, concerning water and water gods and spirits. For other later examples, see Saintyves's essay on walking on the water in his *Essais de folklore biblique*; Alfonso el Sabio, *Cántigas de Santa Maria*, No. 236; F. Callcott, *The Supernatural in Early Spanish Literature*, p. 38; Berceo, *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* (ed. A. G. Solalinde, Madrid, 1922), miracle 22 (the Spanish references were kindly furnished me by Mr. O. H. Green of the University of Pennsylvania). The Mohammedans tell of a dream in which Tāriq ibn Ziyād saw Mohammed and the first four Caliphs walking on the water (Slane's translation of Ibn Khallikān, Vol. III., p. 476): "It is related that, whilst Tāriq was crossing the Strait in his ship, he had a dream in which he saw the Prophet and the four (first) Khalifs walking upon the water until they passed him by, and the Prophet said to him: 'Be of good cheer! Victory awaits you; treat the Musalmans with mildness and be faithful to your engagements.'" (Reference from Professor C. C. Torrey.)

<sup>62</sup>As suggested in the essay on the miracle of walking on the water in Saintyves, *Essais de folklore biblique*.



iv. 35-41; Luke viii. 22-25).<sup>63</sup> Two points are made in this connection. One is that in both the sea was tempestuous and that Jesus figures in saving the disciples from their distress. This is the only "positive" evidence adducible. The second is that Luke omits the story of walking on the water. In regard to the first point, the parallelism is so rudimentary as hardly to deserve any consideration. In all important points the two legends differ: in one Jesus is asleep in the boat; in the other he comes from the shore; in one the miracle consists in stilling the tempest; in the other in walking on the water. In regard to the second point the chain of reasoning seems to be as follows: (1) Luke does not give doublets but omits one, as in the case of the two stories of the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes; (2) Luke omits the legend of walking on the water, which in some respects is similar to that of stilling the tempest; (3) therefore, we must believe that Luke considered the two legends to constitute a doublet, and we must adopt his opinion. The purely negative character of this very subjective line of reasoning that reveals a logical fallacy as soon as stated syllogistically, would perhaps absolve us from the necessity of countering it, but since a better explanation of Luke's omission of the legend of walking on the water is readily at hand, we may give it. Luke, who is considered to have used Mark or perhaps an abbreviated edition of Mark, omits a large portion of the Second Gospel—this is the so-called "Great Omission".<sup>64</sup> Our legend appears just at the beginning of the omitted portion.<sup>65</sup> Hence we may reasonably assume that Luke either did not know this story and what follows in Mark, or else omitted it for some more recondite reason.<sup>66</sup> In any case it is probable that the reason why this legend is omitted from Luke's account must be the same as that responsible for the entire "Great Omission."

This is the only attempt I have seen or heard worked out to connect the story about Christ with other Gospel material, although the suggestion is also made that it is reminiscent of the first post-mortem apparition of Jesus to Peter and the other disciples. This idea seems to me fanciful and far-fetched, as the similarities are few and the divergences many.

<sup>63</sup>See note in Rawlinson, *St. Mark* (Westminster Commentaries), 1925, p. 88.

<sup>64</sup>See Hawkins, *Oxford Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, pp. 60-74.

<sup>65</sup>Streeter, *Four Gospels*, pp. 355 f.

<sup>66</sup>Hawkins, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

The Petrine story might be associated with two Gospel legends. One would connect it with that of Jesus walking on the water, and regard it as an outgrowth from that. Opposed to this theory are various points. In the first place, if this were the case, Peter would walk on the water successfully; there would be no failure. We should certainly not expect imitation to result in such a shocking reversal of the outcome. That very fact, as I have already pointed out above, is enough to make us feel that the story about Peter comes from a unique quarter.<sup>66a</sup> The second point is that the doctrinal basis for the two legends, if they have any at all, is certainly divergent: Jesus performs the miracle by means of his divine power, Peter by the power of faith; in the case of imitation we should expect the two to illustrate the same bit of religious metaphysics.

The other source of the Petrine legend might be the incident in the story of John xxi. 1-11, an event supposed to have taken place after the Resurrection. A number of the disciples, including Peter, were fishing in the Sea of Tiberias. At daybreak Jesus appeared upon the beach, but the disciples did not know him. He asked them if they had aught to eat; they replied no; and he then told them to cast the net to the right side of the boat and they would find. They did so and were not able to draw in the net on account of the number of fish. Then "that disciple whom Jesus loved" said to Peter, "It is the Lord"; whereupon "Peter . . . girt his coat about him (for he was naked), and cast himself into the sea. But the other disciples came in the little boat . . . " The parallelism with the legend of Peter in Matthew is incomplete, but it might afford a basis for legend growth as follows. In the story in John, as in Matthew, Peter and the other disciples, being in a boat, at about the end of the night unexpectedly see Jesus. In John, Peter impetuously leaps out and swims to Jesus on the shore; in Matthew Jesus is on the water, and Peter impetuously goes to him. The course of growth would be possible, but is highly improbable. The Johannine legend occurs in the so-called appendix of John, a portion of that Gospel that is unusually problematic. It is probably later than the rest of the Gospel, which itself is probably later than Mark.<sup>67</sup> What is more the story in John is really a doublet of the miraculous draught of

<sup>66a</sup>For interpretations of this legend as an allegory—an old tradition in the church—see Bacon, *Beginnings of the Gospel Story*, 1909, p. 84; Rawlinson, *St. Mark* (Westminster Commentaries), 1925, p. 88.

<sup>67</sup>Cf. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, pp. 351 ff.

fishes in Luke v. 1-11, in which Peter acts much more moderately. None of these legends provides a satisfactory starting point for those of walking on water.

Last of all, there is no clear doctrinal basis on which the legends of walking on water can rest. The story concerning Peter may be told to illustrate the power of faith, which is an idea that is elsewhere stressed by Jesus. But what does the story about Jesus illustrate? Merely his supernatural power? Possibly so; but no clear indication is given as to what power it is; it is left very vague.

In the end we get back to the point that the Christian legends are isolated in their environment. They have no basis in any beliefs or legends current in Western Asia before their time; they appear full grown at birth. Can we believe that they actually did come into existence so? Let us see what positive considerations can be brought forward against the theory of independent origin.

We have, first, legends in India that are remarkably similar to those in the Gospels, amazingly so, in view of the great dissimilarity between the Gospel legends and anything else existing in their own environment. The story of Jesus has a fairly good parallel in that of the Buddha's conversion of the Kāśyapas, which is illustrated among the bas-reliefs at Sanchi; the story of Peter is an excellent parallel to that of the Buddhist lay disciple at the river Aciravati in the introduction to Jātaka 190. As far as I am aware the first parallel has never been discussed before, but the second has been frequently. Since it is in itself the more striking and has the greater number of incidents, let us bear it in mind particularly in connection with what I have to say here.

The theory of independent origin of cultural elements is that in different parts of the world similar conditions arise and hence human beings, being in general similarly constructed, react in similar fashion. This would be a tenable theory if it were not for the weakness of many of the statements it makes. While it is possible that human beings are very much the same all the world over—and even this is open to argument—it is certainly not true that the environment in which man lives is the same all the world over. The notion that similar cultural elements originate independently in different parts of the world is no more true than is the opposite statement that all similar cultural elements have a common origin. Every parallelism must be examined separately; generalization is for our time completely out of the question.

This is the state of affairs as far as concerns the actual experiences of real life, the tools and deeds of men as they exist concretely, and might be represented in fiction. When we come to unreal life, the case for independent origin is still weaker. While it is possible that two widely separated communities might arrive independently at the same reality, it is highly improbable that both would arrive at the same unreality or improbability. Let us make the matter specific. Both Palestine and India might have evolved similar stories illustrating men swimming through water or wading through it; it is improbable that they should independently have arrived at the notion of men performing the impossible act of walking on the water. But even if we should grant that they could and did arrive independently at this same notion, we have a further point to take into consideration. For although a *single idea* of fiction might arise spontaneously in different quarters of the world, it is wholly unlikely that *parallel stories containing a number of similar ideas woven together into a coherent whole* should so originate. If we regard the incidents and psychic motifs of stories as units, we may say that similar units may exist independently in widely separated communities, but similar *groupings* of incidents are not likely to exist independently. Empiric observation bears this out. There is very little likelihood that stories came from Eurasia to the American Indians before the time of Columbus; hence it is only in keeping with this fact that there is so little correspondence between the folk-tales of the Old World and the New except what can clearly be traced back to the result of known contact. The two bodies of fiction are essentially dissimilar.

Thus it is barely possible that in India and Palestine there should have arisen in each without reference to the other the notion that human beings may miraculously walk on the water. More, each might independently have got the purpose of illustrating some religious notion by means of a miracle based upon that belief. But that they should separately have combined this notion and this purpose in a story, have used them in connection with the same doctrine, faith, and have developed stories closely similar in incident is so improbable as to be almost impossible. Finally that both should carry their story to the same most unusual conclusion, namely the cessation of the miracle on the diminution of faith, is completely incredible. For in that coincidence between the experiences of Peter when his faith grew weak and of the Buddhist lay disciple in



the same circumstances lies the most cogent reason for considering the two legends connected. Each teaches the potency of faith and each illustrates it by the miracle of walking on the water, but neither rests satisfied with the positive example. After illustrating it in this fashion, each goes on to illustrate it negatively by showing the suspension of the miracle when faith diminishes. This is a subtle refinement of teaching by miracle that is exceedingly rare. The natural thing is for a miracle either to work or not to work; for it to do both in the self-same tale is arresting. While both Indian and Christian texts are full of miracles operating positively, neither has many, if any, examples of this negative sort. To find this sort of most recondite handling of miraculous material at all in two separate bodies of religious literature should arouse suspicion, but to find it, being practically a *ἅπαξ λεγόμενον* in each body, attached to similar stories seems to me compelling testimony that the two stories are genetically connected.

Less cogent, yet startling enough in itself, is the point that both the Christian and the Buddhist legend illustrate walking *on* the water. We have seen how rare this is, especially in Western Asia, where the tradition is of human beings walking on dry land between the parted waters. In Palestine the natural development of the theme of crossing water magically would have been along that line. In India, as we have seen, there is a gradual development from the idea of walking through the subsided water to that of walking on the unchanged water, and the final legend is the culmination of centuries of evolution. It is scarcely conceivable that the notion, a product of slow but natural evolution in India, should have come to life in Palestine without any apparent antecedents.

Let us summarize the leading coincidences between the two legends. Both illustrate the miraculous idea of walking *on* the water; both use it to illustrate the efficacy of faith; both show two principal actors, namely, the disciple who has faith and the Master on whom the faith rests; both show the faith operative, then inoperative in consequence of defection. The only important difference is that in the Buddhist tale the disciple renews his faith and restores the miracle, in the Christian he does not; and this dropping off of an element is easily explainable as due to oral breaking down of the tradition, perhaps within the Christian community itself, before it reached the author of the Gospel according to Matthew. In this long train of parallel incidents, some of which are most rare, indeed prac-



tically unheard of otherwise before this time, there is an abundance of reason for considering the two legends genetically related.

In the case of the legend concerning Christ and its Buddhist analogue in the conversion of the Kāśyapas (see above in section "I. C.") the parallelism is far from being as cogent as in the case of the legend concerning Peter. The Buddha does not walk on the water, as does Jesus, but on dry land amidst it and afterwards flies across it. We have already seen that the Buddha, being psychically perfect, is never represented as walking on the water, and we could therefore not expect to find him doing so, but we have then to explain why, if that story is the prototype of the Christian, Jesus does not fly. This is not easy to do, although we may perhaps speculate to the effect that flying across the water was too much for the Christian community to accept, and they compromised on the lesser and more credible, but to them equally novel, miracle of walking on the water. The Sanchi sculpture puts the incident in a light that makes the discrepancy seem less important than it appears from our statement. In that bas-relief the Buddha is walking up and down serene amidst the waves, while the alarmed Kāśyapas are rowing toward him. The scene when they first perceive him is much like that when the disciples first perceive Jesus. Therein lies the essence of the miracle: both Jesus and the Buddha have the power of walking secure in the flood while the others are in a boat; how each Master later gets into the boat is a matter of no consequence, and is stressed by neither the Christian account nor the Buddhist. A greater point of difference is that in the Buddhist legend the Kāśyapas think they are coming to the aid of the Buddha; in the Christian it is the disciples who are distressed by contrary winds, and it is they, if anyone, who are aided. Here the only explanation I can offer is that the Christian tale has been contaminated by the miracle of the stilling of the tempest. The fact is that I should not press the connection between the Christian and the Buddhist legends here, were it not that the story of Peter seems so clearly to be derived from that of the Buddhist lay disciple.

#### B. THE INDIAN SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN LEGENDS

If we are agreed that the Indian and Christian legends are genetically related, the question of determining which is the original is relatively simple. Some years ago I stated four principles for

locating the home of a group of stories illustrating a common theme that are concededly related.<sup>68</sup>

(1). The theme must be shown to have an unequivocal, well established place in the lore of the land posited as its home.

(2) It must occur in the supposed homeland at an earlier date than elsewhere. (This condition, as well as the preceding, must be modified in the case of illiterate lands like Negro Africa.)

(3). It must have some more apposite physical or psychological basis in the homeland than in the other lands where it appears.

(4). It must be traced from the homeland to the lands of its later sojourn.

We have already made available in this study the material to satisfy the first three of these conditions. We find walking on the water well established in the literature of India, appearing there earlier than elsewhere, and more appositely connected with Indian religious metaphysical notions than with Jewish or Christian. There is left only the matter of the theme's progress from India westward.

Here we must at once confess that we are not able to deal in certainties, only in possibilities and probabilities. We have no positive and indisputable evidence that the early followers of Christ received the legends either directly or indirectly from the Buddhists; we cannot say that Buddhist books were taken to Syria by the first century A. D., for they have not been found there by that time either in the original or in translation. Nor does any author report for us as Buddhist legends tales of walking on the water. Our evidence is all inferential. Yet we can point to certain facts that make the "loan theory" plausible.

Since the time of Hecataeus in Greece and the Achaemenians in Persia, records show that knowledge, greater or less in degree and accuracy, has existed in the West concerning India, while the invasion by Alexander gave intercourse between the East and the West a great stimulus. The trade routes by land and by sea provided the means for the transference of commercial commodities and intellectual notions, and both were actually transferred. In view of the amount of knowledge now available on these subjects and the frequent summarizations of the material that have been made, it

<sup>68</sup>*American Journal of Philology*, 43.290.

would be a waste of time to go through it again.<sup>69</sup> It is abundantly clear that the means was available for transporting the Buddhist legends to Syria at this time; especially, therefore, is it probable that the missionary zeal of the Buddhists would see to it that their faith was spread. Let me be content with calling attention to just two instances of contact.

The great Buddhist Emperor Asoka, who sent missionaries in all directions, makes the statement in his 13th Rock Edict, dated 256 B. C. or 251 B. C.,<sup>70</sup> that the conquest of the Law of Piety "has been won by his Sacred Majesty both here (in his own dominions) and among all his neighbors as far as six hundred *yojanas*, where the king of the Yavanas (Greeks) named Am̐tiyoka (Antiochus Theos of Syria and Western Asia, B. C. 261-246) dwells, and beyond this Am̐tiyoka to where (dwell) the four kings named Turamāya (Ptolemy Philadelphos of Egypt, B. C. 285-247), Am̐tekina (Antigonas Gonatas of Macedonia, B. C. 278 or 277-239), Maga (Magas of Cyrene, who became independent of Egypt 285 B. C., died 258 B. C.), and Alikasurindara (Alexander, probably of Epirus, B. C. 272-c. 255, hardly of Corinth, B. C. 252-c. 244 as Bhandarkar supposes<sup>71</sup>)."<sup>72</sup> With all due discount for possible exaggeration of results attained, there is no good reason to doubt the statement that Asoka sent out missionaries to these regions.

The other instance is the monk Zarmanochegas,<sup>73</sup> who accompan-

<sup>69</sup>See such summaries as in the *Cambridge History of India*, vol. I, pp. 391-426; Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, vol. III, pp. 429-448; Rawlinson, *Intercourse between India and the Western World from the Earliest Times to the Fall of Rome*; or in Garbe's *Indien und das Christentum*.

<sup>70</sup>The former, more probable, date according to V. A. Smith, *Asoka* (3d ed.), p. 145; the latter according to Bhandarkar, *Asoka*, p. 48.

<sup>71</sup>Bhandarkar, *Asoka*, p. 48. It is on the basis of this identification that Bhandarkar accepts the date for the inscription of 251. The conclusion is improbable. It is doubtful if Asoka ever heard tell of so insignificant a king as Alexander of Corinth. But even if we admit that he might have and did, we have other points to consider. Alexander of Corinth began to reign in 252; one year later, according to Bhandarkar, the inscription was engraved. That would mean that in one year's time Asoka had heard of the new king's accession, had sent out the embassy, and had had the edict engraved. No such speed obtained in those days. For example, the mission of Poros to Augustus, accompanied by Zarmanochegas, according to Nicolaus of Damascus, took four years for the journey. Or, again, if Asoka could have heard of the accession of Alexander of Corinth and sent out missionaries to his kingdom within a year's time, why should he have been so long in learning of the death of Magas in 258 B. C., six years earlier.

<sup>72</sup>See Smith, *Asoka*, (3rd ed.), pp. 185 ff.; Bhandarkar, *Asoka*, pp. 46, 302.

<sup>73</sup>Equated with Sanskrit *śramaṇacārya*, a very dubious etymology, but for lack of a better perhaps acceptable. The Greeks did horrible things to the words they borrowed and the names they repronounced.

ied an Indian embassy from King "Poros" or "Pandion" to Augustus, by whom it was received at Samos 19 B. C. Later this Zarmanochegas amazed Athens by burning himself to death publicly. The embassy, it is reported, came through Syria and Antioch, where later the Gospel according to Matthew probably assumed its present form,<sup>74</sup> and doubtless it made some impression, however slight. Zarmanochegas is supposed to have been a Buddhist, since the first part of his name may contain the Sanskrit *śramana*, a common designation of a Buddhist monk, both in India and the West. The identification is not certain, but is at least possible.<sup>75</sup>

Many other items could be brought into the discussion. Pliny the Elder, for example, got his material concerning Ceylon from a native of that island who had been shipwrecked in western waters and thus come to Europe. So, too, about the time the Christian Gospels were being composed, the celebrated *Periplus Maris Erythraei* made its appearance.<sup>76</sup> But there is no need to press the point. It is not merely probable that Indian, and especially Buddhist, ideas were transported to Syria by the time of Christ; it is improbable that they were not.

An argument sometimes brought up against the "loan theory" is that "the chief events of the [Buddha's] life—birth, renunciation, enlightenment, and death, the very items which might give strength to the comparison—disappear from the question."<sup>77</sup> This is no argument. In the first place, there are some scholars who would find some of these events reflected in the Gospels. But, be that as it may, we still could hardly expect these major events of the Buddha's life to appear as the major events of Christ's life: if they did, we should not have Christianity, but merely another school of Buddhism. In any case the presence or absence of them in legend concerning Jesus could hardly have any effect upon the question of the borrowing of the miracle of walking on the water. For—and now we speak of a positive matter—if Christianity were to borrow unconsciously from Buddhism, it would borrow just those elements that would fit most easily into its already existing psychology. Such would be legends dealing with miraculous occur-

<sup>74</sup>Cf. Streeter, *Four Gospels*, p. 7 *et passim*.

<sup>75</sup>For references to this embassy and Zarmanochegas, see Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 107 f.; and Kennedy, *JRAS*, 1917, p. 486.

<sup>76</sup>See Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 105 ff.; Elliott, *Buddhism and Hinduism*, vol. III, pp. 431 ff.; Schoff, *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*.

<sup>77</sup>Thomas, *The Life of Buddha as Legend and History*, (1927), p. 248.



rences on or by the water; for the Christian Gospels are full of the air of fishing and inland seas.

The query naturally arises as to whether or not other Indian materials actually have been incorporated in the Christian Gospels. For my part I believe some have, a few in the canonical Gospels, still more in the apocryphal; and other scholars before me have pointed out many cases concerning which they have had this opinion. But it would be unwise to pass a judgment here on any single case without defending my conclusion in the way I have endeavored to defend my conclusion concerning the miracles of walking on the water. Each case must be examined separately; no one should be supported on the basis of probabilities concerning another. The whole question of Indian and Christian relations is too controversial at present to be treated satisfactorily by any other method.





PART V  
CONCLUSIONS



## V. CONCLUSIONS

HERE then we rest our case. The miracle of walking on the water, as it appears in Indian and Christian texts, originated in India, where its roots are found in the Rigveda before 800 B. C. There it is part of the larger theme of crossing water magically, which is invariably illustrated by having the water grow shallow, or by walking upon its surface, or by flying across it. The miracle is due to the favor of a god or of the Buddha, to the magic power of truth, or to the exercise of the psychic power of levitation. The ways in which the miracle is effected are interchangeable, and so too are the means. The Indian stories were carried to Syria, presumably by Buddhists, where though strangers they were so well received that at the time when legends were beginning to cluster around the name of Jesus some of them were attached to his figure.

The story of Jesus walking on the water is possibly a reflection of the story of the Buddha's conversion of the Kāśyapas.

Much stronger is the case for an Indian origin of the legend concerning Peter, which may convincingly be derived from a story of which one example is the introduction to Jātaka 190. The history of the theme, as it concerns the legend of Peter, is as follows:

(1). Rigvedic notions (*a*) crossing a river by persuading a god to make it shallow; (*b*) levitation; both notions coming down into Buddhism.

(2). Yasa crosses a stream to reach the Buddha at Sarnath. No miracle.

(3). Yasa crosses the stream, which has miraculously become shallow for him at the command of the Buddha. Here comes in the Rigvedic element of 1*a*, but with Indra replaced by the Buddha.

(4). After being converted Yasa performs miracles, including walking on the surface of the water. Here there probably came a

variant in which Yasa crossed the river to reach the Buddha by actually walking on the surface of the water, but there is no text giving such an account.

(5). A man crosses a river to reach the Buddha. The water does not subside; but the man sinks in it only up to his ankle. He crosses by means of his faith. Here comes in the Buddhist doctrine of faith in the Buddha.

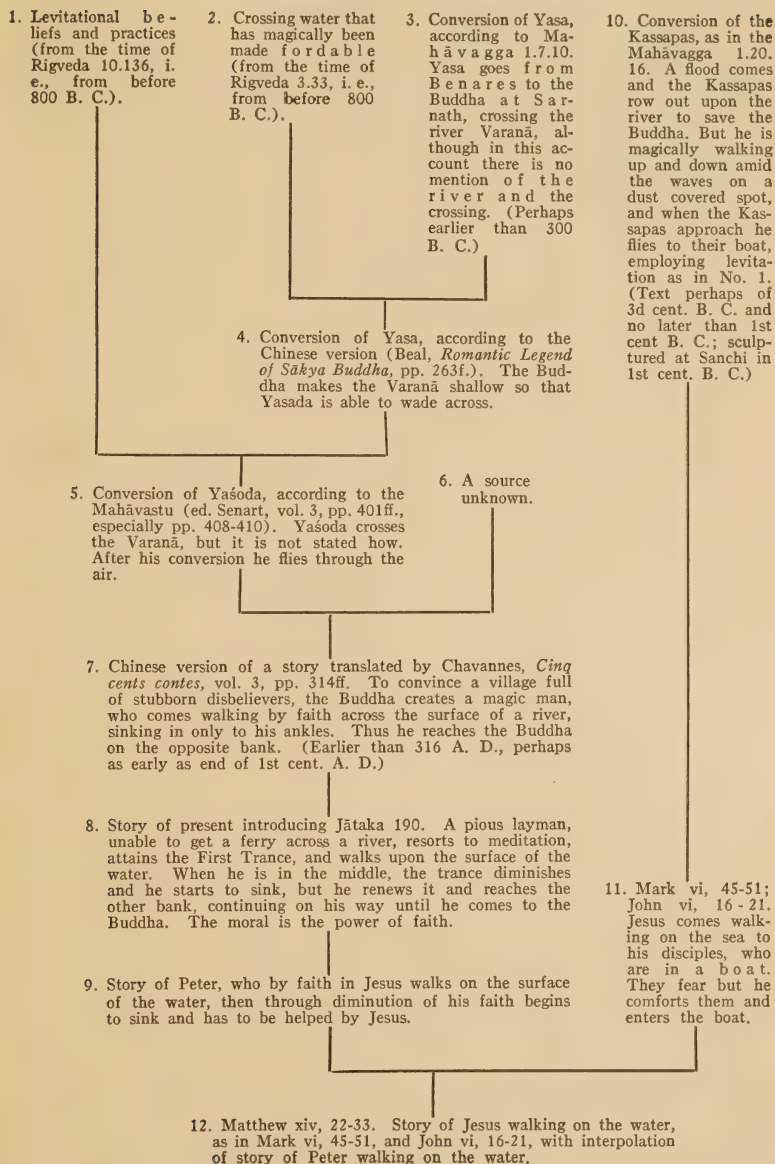
(6). A lay disciple crosses a river to reach the Buddha by walking on its surface. His success is due to faith and meditation on the Buddha through which he attains ecstasy and the magic power of levitation, well established Buddhist notions. In the middle of the stream his faith and ecstasy wane and he sinks. But he renews his faith and ecstasy, and gets across safely.

(7). The story of Peter, which follows (6) closely, except for one departure: Peter, after his faith wanes, does not recover it, and hence has to be helped back into the boat, to the accompaniment of Christ's reproaches.

With only a few minor variations, due to natural changes in a strange environment, the story concerning Peter reproduces that of the Buddhist lay disciple. This theory, as supported by the evidence available, provides a reasonable explanation of the New Testament legends; otherwise none is at hand.



# Genealogical Table of the Early Buddhist and Christian Legends of Walking on the Water





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